

HAJJ STORIES

WHEN THE HEART DIES

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She died a month after her wedding day.

Actually, she has a heartbeat. She is inhaling and exhaling air. In fact, she was seen driving her car to the gymnasium and taking part in some ladies' classes about a month ago. Clearly, she was physiologically functioning. But those who knew her previously say that she is dead. Emotionally and psychologically, she died a month after her wedding day. Even now, in the City of Light called Madinah, her affect was blunted, her tone monotonous, and her interactions with others almost non-existent. Hajj was three weeks away, and that was the only topic that elicited a virtually imperceptible muscular movement along her facial smile lines. She presented at my consulting room just before Maghrib, when I had already closed the doors. Through the window I could see the gentle wave of pilgrims flowing to the shore of the Prophet's Mosque. I was on the verge of asking her to come the next morning. I am glad I did not.

I have seldom seen anyone so detached from society. Amira* briefly explained her medical problem. Acutely aware that the Athan for Maghrib was going to call the faithful within seven minutes, I quickly sorted out her concern. 'Are you being treated for your severe depression?' I asked gently but rather bluntly. She burst out crying. 'I am not depressed, I am just dead,' she sobbed. Outside, hearts were drawn along the day's last rays to where our Deen's greatest inspiration was resting. In my consulting room, a shattered soul was not comforted in the City of Serenity. 'Are you planning to go to the Mosque?' I asked, to which she replied in the affirmative. 'I just do not know where to go,' she added. It was her first day in Madinah, and she was not orientated at all.



In the City of Peace, she had inner turmoil

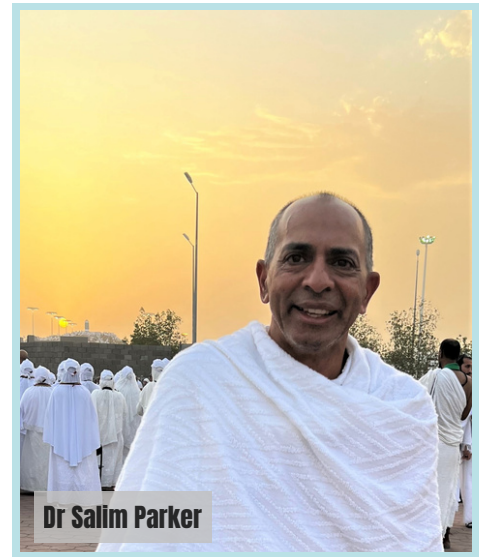
I phoned a sister and luckily, she was still in the hotel foyer. She agreed to wait for my patient. 'Please come see me tomorrow morning before my session starts,' I suggested, and she agreed. I did not manage to get inside the Mosque for the Salaah. It did not matter. I was one of hundreds of thousands who collectively somehow found a place unique for us. No haste, and yet no time wasted. Madinah at sunset is merely a gentle receding of a yawning dusk. Night's gradual embracing of the willing spirit awakens true appreciation of the City to which all who have been blessed to visit, long to return. Even if it turns out to be their final resting place. I found it heartbreaking that, in this tranquil City, nightmares were what she was encountering.

'She struck me as a person of substance'

Amira was punctual the next morning and she spoke. Amongst the tears she spoke. She was married to Amin*. She worked for Amin's father, who was one of the richest men in their city, if not in the country. Amin truly admired and respected his father. When the latter advised him to marry Amira, he obeyed. There was obviously the massive inheritance that may have been at stake if he disobeyed. Deep down in his heart, he did not want to get married. A month after their wedding, when she arrived late at home, after being delayed in transacting one of his father's multi-million rands deals, he exploded. He screamed that he did not love, want, or appreciate her in his life. That he never wanted to marry her. He never knew her except as someone who was employed, as many others were, by his father. He only agreed to the wedding at his father's suggestion. She must have influenced his father in her quest for instant riches. She was dumbstruck.

In her mind, his father never insisted. He merely suggested. She was the typical old-school conservative who just was blessed with an incredible ability to grasp complex business concepts. His father immediately realised her potential and rapidly promoted her in his company. What impressed him more was her soft, humane and genuinely caring nature whose Deen was her guide. She never advertised her adherence to her faith. She would slip away unnoticed during a meeting to perform her compulsory prayers. But he noticed. Her father was one of his most trusted employees and soon he was summoned by his boss to discuss a union of the two families. Her father let her decide and she consented. She never expected her husband to call her a gold-digger. All her father asked for was that the couple should perform Hajj as soon as possible.

She planned to file for divorce, but fate intervened. Amin's father asked them to see him about a matter that he wants to settle. One of his siblings passed away recently and had never performed Hajj despite having had the means. He asked Amin, who had



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already accomplished the blessed journey four times, to perform it on his uncle's behalf. Of course Amira would have to perform her mandatory fifth pillar of Islam. How could she refuse? Hajj was what she had always dreamed of, and now the opportunity arose. Amin wanted to please his father, and they both agreed. His father was a man of enormous influence and means, and all logistics were taken care of within a week. 'Hajj is an eye opener,' both fathers told her. They may have noticed a strain in their children's marriage, but did not allude to it at all.

I have had tens of thousands of patients in my life. She struck me as a person of substance, of great integrity and deeply immersed in her faith. However, illness can strike anybody, and depression does not spare even those who have the utmost faith in their Creator. I advised her about medication, and for both to seek counselling, and indicated that they were welcome to see me. I never saw her again but heard from a fellow pilgrim that her husband forbade her from consulting me. Amira must have informed him of our discussion. This saddened me, as I would really have appreciated hearing from him to get balanced input.

A few days before Hajj Amin was rushed to my room. He had a severe asthma attack. He indicated to fellow pilgrims who witnessed his severe struggle to breathe that he did not wish to see me, but my rooms were on the premises, and they had no other choice. He clearly resented my attending to him. After he was stabilised, he just wanted to get out of my room. 'I just want to speak to you for a few minutes,' I suggested. 'I know my wife spoke to you, but it really is not for you to worry about,' he abruptly replied. 'I just want to tell you the story of one of my patients. Her husband's first wife passed away, and he married my patient a year later. The first wife had a child before she passed away. A beautiful child, an angel in looks, manners, intelligence and behaviour. Perfect in the eyes of the whole world in all respects, except to her. To her the child was the devil itself. She could not see the goodness because it was someone else's child,' I persisted.

'What are you trying to say?' he snorted. 'Do not let your failed wish not to enter marriage blind you to who you married,' I replied. 'When on Arafat, ask yourself what your father sees in her that you are oblivious of,' I added. He stormed out, and I never saw him again either. A few days later, on Arafat, they were still on my mind, and I made earnest Duaa for them. About a year later, a fellow pilgrim informed me that he met them at a holiday resort, walking hand in hand, with him holding their baby on his other arm. Allahu Akbar.

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