

HAJJ STORIES

WHEN ANGELS SMILE ON YOU

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'He said that my Hajj package was all paid up. It was not; he cannot account for the money, and I suffered a literal and figurative loss.'

She came to see me in Cape Town about a health issue just before Ramadan. Hajj was a few months away. 'I was going to come for my Hajj vaccinations. Instead, I am now here to get advice about how to adjust my diabetic medication when I am going to fast during Ramadan,' she smiled wryly and with some bitterness evident. 'Why don't we do both? That will save you from paying for another consultation,' I replied, oblivious of her circumstances. 'I'll perform my Hajj one day, Allah willing,' she said with determined conviction. 'It will just not be this year. Yes, I have been accredited to go, and I thought I had more than enough money saved over the last two decades. However, I was wrong, so wrong.' She burst into tears. It took her a while to regain her composure, and then she related her non-Hajj journey.

'I do not think any angels are smiling on me'

Many, including her, trusted a particular agent. To be fair, he used to collect money from pilgrims for years and as far as I could ascertain, they all embarked on their Hajj pilgrimage once he had collected the required funds from them and they had been accredited. She was following a decade-old family and friend custom and had no reason to anticipate anything untoward from him. Until he came to see her personally a few weeks before our consultation. He could not explain it fully. All he could say was that he did not have the money. That she would not be able to fulfil her compulsory obligation towards her Creator. He assured her that all will be sorted next year. He was working frantically resolving his financial issues. He would even sell his house to guarantee her journey next year. She must forgive him for the delay. It was just that, a mere delay.

Her initial incredulosity quickly turned to anger. Why could he not sell his house, or for that matter, his car, immediately and give her the funds for this year? She was going to turn him over to the lawyers and get her money back. She soon realised that that would be futile as he had no tangible assets that could readily be converted to cash. 'He gave some reasons for what happened, but I really was not paying attention as I was too distressed,' she told me. 'I resigned myself to my fate, and maybe I will indeed be able to go next year. I do not think any angels are smiling on me,' she said sadly. I tried

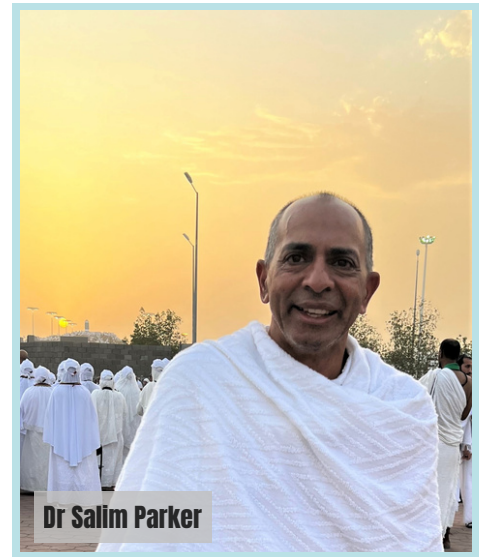
consoling her, but it was evident that she was severely distressed. She plunged herself into other activities to distract her from her heartbreak. It did not work.

I saw her again two days after Ramadan. 'I should have taken the vaccines at my previous visit,' she smiled. She excitedly told me that the agent came back to her and had virtually all her money for her journey. She was going for Hajj after all this year! 'The angels are smiling on you now,' I replied. She burst out crying. Crying out of happiness. Crying out of relief. Crying, because more than a decade of meticulous planning was finally materializing. She will be going with two of her siblings and their spouses as one family. Somehow the agent heard about these plans that were going to be completely messed up if she could only go the next year. He was not a con artist after all, and he ensured that she would be able to perform Hajj as she planned.

She was over sixty years old and only needed one compulsory vaccine. 'Our practice is not charging you for the vaccine,' I informed her. 'I am sorry Doc, but I have to pay you. The agent did not return all my money, and one of my siblings provided me with the vaccine money. This money was specifically intended for the vaccine purpose, and I cannot take it,' she replied. I took the money, which was neatly and meticulously inserted in a self-made envelope. On it was scribed, in a very unique, elegant and cursive style, a clearly personalized message. 'May the injection keep you healthy, my beloved sister,' were the words. I arranged for her to get a receipt. 'You have settled your account now,' I said. I then put the money back in the same envelope and handed it to her. This is from our practice, may Allah accept your Hajj and protect you,' I said.

'The angels stopped smiling on me,' she said very, very despondently. It was about a week before she was to depart for Hajj. She had an emergency

operation and was advised by her surgeon that she should not travel. I heard about her misfortune via another pilgrim and went to visit her whilst she was medical background. 'You prayed, saved and fought so much to go on this journey, you will recover in time,' her sister said firmly. 'Sometimes the doctors are wrong,' she added, and then, probably instinctively, asked me what my opinion was. As a travel medicine practitioner, we have guidelines. But that is what they are, mere guidelines.



Dr Salim Parker

What we then consider are the individual's particular circumstances. It is: 'this traveller, undertaking this specific journey, to this destination, for this duration, for this purpose and with a predetermined group.'

I asked her to come to my consulting rooms a few days later. She was stable. On the flight that she was booked to fly to Saudi Arabia on, were two medical colleagues I knew very well. Of course they would keep an eye on her. She had her family, and the rest of her group were all travelling as one large unit. Hajj may be an individual journey where each soul attempts to connect on Arafat with its Creator. It is, however, also a collective journey. Sometimes it is the physical assistance of helping with heavy luggage. Sometimes it is a small Duaa of encouragement when fatigue sets in. Sometimes it is that welcoming Zamzam that a fellow pilgrim brings that not only quenches the thirst but also simultaneously uplifts the spirit. 'The angels never stopped smiling at you,' I thought. 'You are fit to travel,' I told her.

What I find the most amazing constant on Hajj is the totally unexpected. The fit marathon runner who needs wheelchair support during the five days of Hajj. Conversely, the terminally ill who turn out to be physical and spiritual support for the supposedly healthy fellow pilgrims. She was not exactly Herculean in her abilities, but she was a constant source of inspiration to many. I was humbled to see her, her family, and her massively extensive Hajj family on Arafat. Smiles and blessings were raining down on her. 'Labaik! The smiles are here.



The sun smiled onto her as she entered Mina