

# HAJJ STORIES

## OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

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"Will my daughter's Hajj be considered her obligatory Hajj? I am getting different opinions. She is fifteen years old. She has, however, never had a menstrual period," the mother said.

We were in Madina, the City of Peace. Hajj was to commence in about four weeks' time. We were of the first groups to have arrived in Saudi Arabia and nearly all who consulted me were glowing with tranquility, irrespective of the severity of their medical conditions. She brought the teenager for the normal scourge that afflicts nearly all pilgrims in Madina, a runny nose and a cough. The youngster was a confident lady who spoke very easily about her symptoms. Medically she was what I expected a female of her age to look like, and she had all the normal characteristics of a woman. Except that she has never had a period. After attending to her sniffles, sore throat and irritating cough, I asked her a few questions. She was highly intelligent and very knowledgeable about her Deen. She researched nearly everything about Hajj and attended several classes in order to be as prepared as possible for this journey.

### ***'Why were you so anxious for this to be your obligatory Hajj?'***

When I started probing the issue of her menstruation or lack thereof, her interactive and enthusiastic demeanour changed dramatically. Her gaze lowered, her words were more measured, and her tone became monochromatic. Tears welled up in her eyes. 'What is wrong with me?' she asked. She attended as all girl Islamic school in the north of South Africa. She was the top academic achiever in her grade by such a long way that the rest of her peers resigned themselves to competing for the second spot. She also excelled in the sporting codes that she participated in. She was physically like any other fifteen-year-old girl and had no masculine features that would have prompted detailed medical investigations. It was really a case of a normal girl with superior academic and sporting abilities who had delayed onset of menstruation.

The effects of it on her emotional wellbeing were devastating. She was teased continuously by her classmates about being different, about really being a male in a female body. Jealous peers mocked her about not being a real woman and she was excluded from discussions that young girls engage in. She saw a gynaecologist prior to commencing the journey and was reassured that there was nothing to worry about. Medication was offered by someone which they declined to use. 'What is wrong with me?' she burst out crying. Gone was the confident, well-versed and sophisticated young woman. I was looking at a psychologically wrecked young child whose self-esteem was shattered by the vicious assaults by

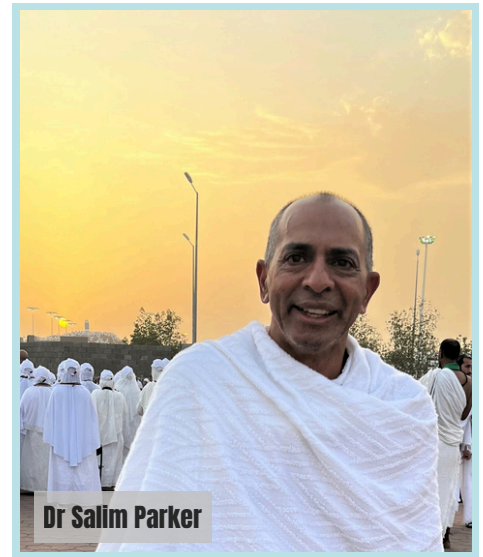
society at large. Her parents constantly supported her and were prepared for nature to take its course. They were the exception though; the rest of the world was gloating in its quest to continue destroying her.

There were no other patients waiting for me and I had time to question her and her mother extensively. She had all the normal female developments and was as feminine, if not more, than her peers. There were medical signs that she would start menstruating soon. 'How soon?' was their immediate retort when I mentioned it to them. I gave them the same answer as the expert. 'Most likely in the next few months,' was the only honest assessment I could give. There was a visible disappointment evident in their facial expression. 'Your Hajj will be accepted,' I tried reassuring her. 'It does not matter what your age is, if you make your Niyah, put on your Ihram, stand on Arafat and correctly perform all the other requirements, Allah will definitely accept your Hajj,' I continued. 'I understand that, but will it be considered my obligatory Hajj or will I still have to come again later in my life?' she asked.

'Allah does not make our obligations difficult for us. If you return one day you would be one of very few people who would have stood on Arafat twice in their lifetime. And if for some reason, whether financial or health wise, you cannot come back, Hajj would not be obligatory on you,' I replied. 'You never know, there is still a month to go before the first day of Hajj,' I added. I called one of my learned friends to join our discussion as to when someone is considered an adult. It was evident that there were differences of opinions amongst scholars as far as age and other signs of sexual maturity was concerned, with the only absolute consensus in females being the onset of menstruation. 'Allah knows your intention,' the Sheikh said. 'You are here, you know that you want to complete the fifth pillar of Islam, you are of sound mind and very knowledgeable, so let Allah guide you,' he advised.

I saw her once more in Madinah for a skin problem, and then we moved to Makkah. She and her family regularly greeted me during the communal meals. Our group was about to move to Azizyah about eight days before Hajj was to start when I got a frantic phone call from her mother. 'Can we please come see Doc?' she pleaded. My consulting room had already been reallocated to other pilgrims and we arranged to meet in the foyer where we managed to find a secluded area. 'I got my period,' the youngster said anxiously, and immediately added: 'Will I be fine for Arafat?' I had to smile. 'Firstly, you wanted your menstruation to start and now you are concerned that it may not stop,' I said. 'You are going to be fine, do not worry, Allah is blessing you with what your heart desires,' I added.

We went through different possible scenarios, and she decided to take my advice and not interfere with nature. They were to depart about a week after Hajj ended, so she really had many options if she still had issues during Hajj. She came to see me a day before

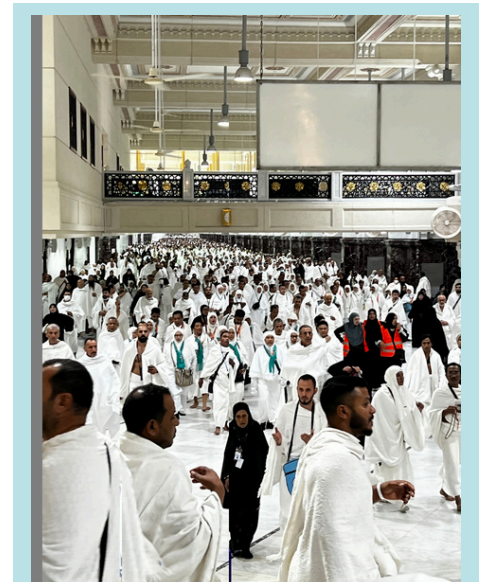


Dr Salim Parker

the first day of Hajj and waited patiently for her turn to be seen. My consulting room was packed with Hujjaaj anxious to be at their optimal health before the most important five days of their lives. 'I am not sick Doc, I just brought you some chocolates. Oh, my period has stopped,' she smiled. 'Why were you so anxious for this to be your obligatory Hajj?' I asked. She started crying.

'I was not supposed to come now. My parents and my grandmother were supposed to come but unfortunately my granny passed away a few months ago. She in effect raised me as both my parents work. On one occasion, a few days before she passed away, she said that her performing Hajj was her ultimate dream. She never mentioned that someone should perform it on her behalf if she could not do it, but at that moment I knew that I wanted to. My parents brought me in her place. Now I am fulfilling my obligation to my Creator. One day I'll return and put on Ihram in her name,' were the words she calmly and determinedly said. Words and thoughts way beyond her young age. I could only marvel at her maturity.

I saw her on Arafat standing with her parents at the time of Wuquof. A month ago she was in effect a child, carrying the burden of not being considered a woman by many. Now she has taken her place among other adults and already committed herself to one day be the vehicle for her granny to be blessed with Hajj. I made Duaa that Allah would indeed honour both of them.



***Our mothers, sisters and daughters face unique challenges during Hajj***