

Makkah awakens you to the real priorities



Some talk of an easy way to get into the Haram, others about the best time to perform tawaaf, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

‘WHERE is your husband?’ someone asked her. We were all in the restaurant of our hotel in Makkah about two weeks before Hajj was to start.

Breakfast was a time shared with new-made friends, new-formed alliances as well as strengthening existing bonds. The atmosphere is invariably jovial as the hujjaaj exchange their experiences.

Of course, the necessities of travel, such as where to get the best quality garments at the best prices or where to exchange money for the best rates has to be discussed. The food served is always a rich topic of discussion.

Inevitably, talk gravitates to more pertinent issues. Some talk of an easy way to get into the Haram, others about the best time to perform tawaaf and when to try to get as close to the Kaabah as possible. Small groups congregate and plan an additional Umrah while others start an initiative to feed the poor who are evident even in the avalanche of excess.

All of this was happening as she sat alone, waiting for her spouse to make an appearance. It was widely known where he was most likely to be. No, not in the Haram, not sleeping nor busy with the usual activities for which Hajj is known.

‘He is probably in the room,’ she replied. Their table just had its standard cutlery on it and a glass of Zam-zam, which she was slowly drinking – for more than an hour already. She was patiently waiting for him, and was not going to start indulging from the extensive buffet before he made an appearance.

‘Oh, is he still doing some business?’ someone dryly asked.

‘Probably,’ was her hesitant, sad but very predictable reply. ‘Some urgent business matter must

have cropped up and it most likely needs his immediate and urgent attention. He should be here soon,’ she added.

We all knew by then that soon could be any time. Her husband was a fabulous person who got along with everyone; a jovial, social and very likable person who engaged with everyone – with everyone when he was around that is. He was constantly on his phone, either instructing business directions to some hapless employee at his office verbally or ma-

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That was one part of his being that he did without any fanfare. He was a true believer in giving with the one hand without the other knowing about it.

His good qualities could however not camouflage his absolute obsession with doing business, and that he was doing that in his room on his laptop as his wife waited for him. Food would have to wait, his spouse would have to wait and everything would have to wait.

In fact, when he arrived in Makkah clad in his ihraam, he immediately, after getting to his hotel room, started working on his laptop and delayed his group from performing Umrah as he took a while to join them where they had assembled in the foyer at the agreed time.

I have often realised that the obsession is not to amass a fortune; it is the adrenaline rush of initiating, brokering and finally concluding a deal that fuels the ad-

diction. He was not addicted to money, he was addicted to making money. A large percentage of this he would spend in the way of charity.

A few days later, he and his wife were returning from the Haram to the hotel after the evening prayers when he received the inevitable phone call and somehow wandered off in a random direction, gesticulating feverishly.

When he finished his conversation some time later, he realised that his wife was not with him and decided to return to the hotel. When he got there, she was not in the room nor was she anywhere else in the hotel. He decided to wait for her in the room, while busy on his laptop, of course.

After more than an hour, he started to worry about her whereabouts. She did not have her mobile phone with her as she believed it to be a distraction, and also as they normally meet outside the Haram after prayers at a pre-arranged place if they get separated.

She would often comment on how taking selfies and photos seemed to be more important to some than sitting and reciting in the Haram.

Another hour passed and there was still no sign of her. He put away his laptop and decided to go look for her. She would never do anything without informing him so this worried him. He knew her intimately, and went down to the Haram but soon realised that find-

ing her amongst the thousands in the vast expanses would be near impossible.

He stared at the Kaabah and found himself making duah for her safety. By now, he was starting to panic, and subconsciously, started to walk to the place where they meet if they get separated.

She was standing there. He rushed up to her, and burst out crying as he could not contain his emotions. She was completely dumbstruck and could not understand his concerns.

‘But I told you that I was going back to perform a tawaaf!’ she said. She explained to him that when they left the Haram they were chatting about how relatively empty it was there. People were streaming out and it would have been easier than normal to go back for a tawaaf.

When his mobile had rung, she realised that he would probably be engaged in a long conversation and told him that she would rather perform a tawaaf than wait for him to finish his conversation. ‘You said it was fine if I do that!’ she reminded him.

‘I must have been distracted and did not hear that,’ he confessed. She was not a lady to spit back retorts and remained silent. ‘I did not realise that I would panic like this when I realised that you were gone,’ he said.

‘I just got back to the hotel now and was told that you went looking for me. I thought you would look at our normal place and that’s why I came here,’ she said.

It seemed that something stirred in him. ‘Will you come with me for a tawaaf now?’ he asked.

‘Are you not hungry? You did not have supper yet from what I have gathered,’ she responded.

‘Neither did you eat yet,’ he said, fully aware that she always waits for him for any meal.

‘I am hungry but would infinitely prefer to be performing a tawaaf with you,’ she smiled. He switched off his phone when they entered the Haram; the Kaabah welcomed them in all its glory.

Much, much later, they had supper at one of the small tucked away restaurants as their hotel’s one was closed for hours already.

‘Let’s go back to the Haram,’ he suggested. ‘I want to stay there for Tahajud and then till Fajr.’ His phone was still switched off and there was no mention of his computer.

They sat looking at the Kaabah. For the first time he was aware of the spirituality of all around him. He was not merely participating in a ritual in order to get done, he was immersed and living his deen. His digital detoxification had commenced.

For more Hajj Stories visit www.hajjdoctor.co.za. You may contact Dr Parker via e-mail: salimparker@yahoo.com



Even though you could be deeply engrossed with your worldly affairs upon entering Makkah, the spirituality of the Haram will eventually open your eyes to the true reason for being there. Photo SALIM PARKER