

# Summitting the Mountain of Light



**All who undertake the walk should summit well before Fajr, the time of the morning prayer, writes DR SALIM PARKER.**

'I AM going to climb Jabal Noor.' It was a statement of fact, a firm assertion that it was a decision that was not to be debated.

It was a few days before Hajj and the group she was travelling with had decided to climb the famed mountain the next day.

She was in her early thirties and though not an athlete, was not an invalid. The plan was that everyone was to have an early night and be up and ready by two in the morning when the buses would fetch them. The buses would reach the base of the mountain within half-an-hour and the hour-long climb should, theoretically, commence about thirty minutes later.

All who undertake the walk should summit well before Fajr, the time of the morning prayer, and then admire the sunrise from the top. Most would try and get into the Cave of Hira and try to perform prayers in there, where the Prophet (SAW) received his first revelation.

She was so determined to go, except, she was quite sick. When

she consulted me, she had a raging fever and was coughing quite badly.

I assured her that she would be fully recovered by the time Hajj started. All she had to do was to take the dispensed medication as prescribed and rest. 'Give me three days of rest and you'll have five days of Hajj,' was my standard advice.

'I need to be better by tomorrow,' she stated as a matter of fact. 'We are climbing the mountain tomorrow and I must go. I have been exercising for a few months and I am quite sure that I'll make it to the top,' she continued.

'I want to walk up the mountain and experience what my beloved Prophet (SAW) did, what he saw, and sit in the cave where he found seclusion. I have looked forward to this trip for so long and will not miss it for anything in this world,' she added.

'Your health comes first,' I replied. 'Remember that the climb is not part of Hajj. It is currently very hot, and even in the early hours of the morning the temper-



The snaking path up Jabal Noor.

Photo SALIM PARKER

ature will be more than thirty degrees. It is not an easy climb and during this time of the year, with millions in Makkah, the congestion makes it even more difficult.

'You most likely will not even get anywhere close to the Cave of Hira. We all have our plans for how we want our complete journey to be. I know your heart says that it wants to ascend those steps that our Prophet (SAW) paved so many hundreds of years ago. If you cannot follow in his footsteps tomorrow, it will not affect your Hajj at all. If you are well a day or two after Hajj then maybe you can attempt it then.'

She was in tears now. 'That will not be possible,' she replied. 'Our flight departs the day after Hajj finishes. I am going tomorrow. I hear you are a good doctor. Please make me fit for tomorrow.'

I smiled. 'Healing is only through the will of Allah,' I replied. I knew it took a few days to recover from the infection that she had. We reflected on the number of essentials of the journey that are not part of Hajj. Visiting Madinah and the Mosque of the Prophet (SAW) are not part of the fifth pillar of Islam.

'You once lamented about not visiting the City of Light one year, Doc. I am going to feel as deprived, as empty as you felt if I do not go to the Mountain of Light. I know that the climb is not part of Hajj but, just as visiting Madinah enhances and compliments the journey, so many of us have been really looking forward to tomorrow,' she said.

She described how their spiritual leader had explained the first revelation in detail to them and, totally enthralled, the fire for the whole group's intention to visit the mountain had been ignited.

'Let's see how you are tomorrow morning,' I advised. Deep down I already knew the outcome.

As expected, she was one of the first waiting for the bus. 'I am feeling fine, Doc,' she told me, even though her pale demeanour and slightly sweaty forehead indicated otherwise. 'Besides, you are with me so if anything happens to me, I'll be in good hands.'

I must admit to the dread of trying to carry a sick person down the mountain, and merely smiled. The bus set off and we soon reached the base. The walk from the parking area to the beginning

of the steps up the path was unbelievably steep and that alone discouraged a number of pilgrims from going any further.

There are a number of shops and convenient sitting areas at the base and one of the group leaders was to stay behind with them until the rest finished the climb. Nothing was going to stop her though.

I looked around and noticed that the vast majority of climbers that morning were elderly. A group of geriatrics looked all in their eighties and more than half of them were using walking aids, with a sprightly looking ninety-year-old urging them on.

'Look at them Doc,' she said. 'Nothing is going to stop them. I feel humbled by their efforts.' She had a bit more colour to her skin, and definitely had more energy and determination now.

'Just take it slowly,' I advised, half unnecessarily as she was assisting and encouraging the slower walkers.

The climb proceeded steadily with the fitter members of our group reaching the top within thirty minutes while the rest were there after about an hour. There are numerous sections where a slip could lead to serious falls and injuries but the bond between fellow pilgrims is such that each one had at least five others being their guardians to lighten their journey.

Even though we summited early in the morning, the entry to the cave was congested and many could not enter it at all, despite at-

tempting to do so. We performed Fajr on the mountain and witnessed the sunrise over the mountain.

Despite what the Saudi religious authorities fear, we did not observe anyone engaging in prohibited activities. Everyone was just grateful to be able to follow in the footsteps of the torchbearer of our beautiful religion.

Despite the congestion and crowds, the serenity and calm of the isolated mountain was palpable and it was impossible not to be deeply moved by the experience. The spiritual reward was certainly worth the physical effort.

The descent was slow due to the high temperature, and the excited group could not contain their enthusiasm when we finally reached our hotel. Though the group leaders advised everyone to rest, they were all still recounting their experience by midday in the foyer of the hotel.

She looked completely exhausted when I happened to get there to attend to a sick patient – exhausted but completely content. She thanked me profusely and started talking about the days ahead.

'Don't worry Doc. I am going to follow your instructions. I want my five days of Hajj. There are four days left so I am now going to have my three days of rest.'

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All ages ascend the mountain, always stretching out a helping hand.

Photo SALIM PARKER



Pollution leads to other primates being attracted to the famed mountain.

Photo SALIM PARKER