

Feeling Down; Let Down



Hajj Stories

Dr Salim Parker

He was found lying in the garage, with a bullet wound to his head. A gun was next to him. No crime was suspected, and an autopsy was performed as it was clearly an unnatural death. 'I cannot believe it. I saw him two

one who was on Hajj with him a few months prior to this event was shell-shocked. 'It cannot be true!' was the general sentiment despite the fact that we were carrying his body, now devoid of its soul, to its final resting

for a while, and this led to our Hujjaaj feeling rather distressed and bothered. I had very little sleep the previous few nights and responded to any medical queries or occurrences as needed. There was not the mental or physical alertness to proactively scan the Hujjaaj and notice if any of them needed medical attention. He was extremely alert though. 'Doc, I think that uncle over there needs to be seen by you. He is very lethargic and seems disinterested in everything around him,' I recall him advising me on the first day of Hajj on Mina. He was absolutely right and the medical intervention there and then ensured that the old man was relatively well the next day on Arafat. He was that alert about others. Sadly he has now departed. Should we as doctors have been more alert and picked up signs, no matter how subtle, that something was bothering him? Was something bothering him at all whilst we were on Hajj? Sadly, we'll never know those answers.

On Arafat he assisted a wheelchair bound pilgrim. 'The elderly man should not be stressed at the most important time of his life so let's make him as comfortable as possible,' he told me. He stood at the time of Wuqoof and took part in the collective

promised that he would forgive more of us there and then than at any other time of the year. We were as close to Allah as we could ever possibly be and to even doubt that our sins will not be forgiven if we sincerely repent would be to doubt Allah's word and is considered a sinful act in itself by some. He did not show any sign of worrying behaviour at all and was overwhelmed by the honour of standing on Arafat.

We all set off to Musdalifah that evening, and just after midnight set off for Mina where we pelted the large Jamarat. We then made our way to Makkah to perform our compulsory Tawaaf and made our way back to our abodes from where, after a few hours of relaxation, we returned to Mina. Here again he was constantly on the lookout for anyone who needed assistance and on more than one instance Hujjaaj thanked him for always being alert to the needs of others. His bed was right opposite mine and we spoke quite exten-

from South Africa. When I looked up I saw him smirking and realized that he playfully snapped me in my deep slumber and sent the photo to family members back home. He had that type of character; helpful and alert to the extreme, jovial and playful when the occasion arose. We used to share thoughts when we had meals on Mina and wished each other all the best at the beginning of our renewed lives. We were all to return to South Africa as ambassadors, our inspired journey equipping us to motivate the following year's Hujjaaj to prepare themselves for the most awe-inspiring journey any Muslim can ever undertake.

Some people are very vocal, and express their thoughts and feelings, whether appropriate or not, at all times. Others are able to ruminate and in short but compelling sentences eloquently let their views and emotions be known. Then there are some in whom we can clearly observe that all is not well and it can

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sively of the amazing journey that we were all experiencing. Did I notice anything untoward? No, I did not. Were there any triggers that should have alerted any of us that something was amiss? We often notice subtle changes, some nuances that should lead us to gently enquire a bit deeper into their wellbeing. There were none that we could recall. In fact he would often crack jokes and make some funny remarks that were indicative of a very sharp mind.

On one occasion, after a hectic medical session, I simply flopped down on my mattress in Mina. I must have been in a deep sleep for, when I was awoken by a alarm indicating a message on my phone, I found myself in a daze in a very unflattering posture. The message on the screen was a picture of me in the very unflattering position and looking completely zonked, eyes tightly shut, mouth wide open and limbs splayed all over. What initially confused me was that the photo was sent

take a considerable effort to extract what is bothering them and what their views are about it. Finally we find those who feel that they are in an ever descending downward spiral with no possibility of ever being able to get out of the hole, whether mental or social, that they find themselves in. Some find solace in their Deen, and the vast majority find Hajj a really positive and spiritually and mentally uplifting journey.

Then we find people who seem to mask what's bottled up inside them so perfectly that all seems well to the outside world. Of the little interactions I had, he was always looking out to help others. I am not certain how many, if anyone, reached out to him when he was plunged, just a few months after Hajj, into the depths of despair. He opened my eyes to our limitations, and we ask our Creator to guide us in order to prevent its recurrence.

salimparker@yahoo.com



At times no one knows what is spinning in the minds of some of us.

weeks ago and he was his jovial self, just like he was on Hajj' my practice partner and fellow Hajj addict, an astute doctor with thirty years of experience and someone who could detect psychological issues from a mile away, remarked to me. We all went to his Janazah, and every-

place. None of us could reconcile the current event with our fond recollections of our interactions with him during Hajj a few months earlier.

The days of Hajj were scorching hot and we had a number of sick patients that year. Our tents had non-functioning air-conditioners

Duaas that we all made as a group. We prayed for the oppressed, the sick, the displaced from their country of birth and for the whole of Mankind. It was incredibly inclusive, yet it was as individual as can be. Whilst we were all engaging in our worship, our Creator has