

Hajj Stories

The Right Time

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When I look for something in particular, I look as bewildered as a desperate toddler separated from its protective mother. My head and eyes would randomly move between quite unrelated distinct places and my walking direction would suddenly change, perilously affecting those in the immediate vicinity.

“Now on Arafat she stood under a tree and he stood just outside his tent”

When I walk around without a particular mission, it seems that I notice and absorb nearly everything. These seemingly aimless walks has led to the discovery of the most beautiful sunsets and sunrises, of a mosque and an adjacent church in architecturally the most collegial of out-reaches, and of life’s innermost turmoils. It of course helps to be a doctor since previous encounters in the consultation room fills in the gaps and puts into context disparate observations. This happened on Arafat when I walked around during the time of Wuqoof merely taking in the blessing of being as close to our Creator as was possible for us mere mortals.

She stood under a tree, standing as many would at the auspicious

time. There was no exaggerated movement, there was the simple humility of a lady deep in prayer and appreciation, head bowed in submission to her Lord, hands cupped and ever slightly held upwards. She was standing all alone, unlike the many other pilgrims who either stood as couples or as family groups. To

the uninformed that would not be unusual as many perform the fifth pillar of Islam on their own. She could have been unmarried, or divorced, or simply have been an individual traveller among her millions of brothers and sisters. I knew however that she travelled with her spouse. He was present on Arafat. I saw him standing just outside his tent staring at her, with no smile or softness discernible on his face. In fact he was seething with anger.

‘My marriage is non-existent Doc,’ she matter of factly informed me about two weeks before Hajj. She came to consult me in Makkah for a medical problem and it was evident that though she was overwhelmed for being honoured to be on

Hajj, her presence here was tinged by a bit of sadness. Her statement came in response to me stating that the best time a couple can appreciate their Deen and their relationship is on Hajj. I was taken aback. Her husband consulted me just before I saw her and he was waiting for her outside. ‘He was never physically abusive and he provided just about the basics for me. I was not allowed to work even though I had a good university education. My parents used to say that was in case things did not work out in my life. Till this day I am not certain whether that made any sense. My husband was from a different Mathab to mine and firmly believed that a woman’s place is at home,’ she added.

She described how he would do all the shopping and would not provide her with any money. She did indicate that there was always enough food in the house and that he ensured that she had enough clothes which mostly consisted of Burqas. Before she fully appreciated the difference between her previous and current lifestyles, she already gave birth to two daughters. ‘When they ready for school I’ll move back to my parents,’ she decided. He was emotionally manipulative, citing her lack

of understanding and adherence to his strict interpretation of Islamic rules as her guarantee to eternal hell. He loved his daughters and they were spoilt rotten and they in turn adored him. ‘I cannot tear them away from him,’ she despaired. She then decided that she’ll wait till they finished school. This then got extended till they finished their university studies. She engrossed herself in the upbringing of her daughters and also did some religious studies which her husband was not aware of as he would have prohibited it. ‘He allowed our daughters to study, travel and gain autonomy whilst keeping a vice-like grip on me,’ she said.

Thirty years passed in this manner and the children were married. This was the time that she decided to finally leave and she

consulted her brother about her intention. ‘Are you sure?’ her brother asked. ‘Your husband told me that you are leaving for Hajj next year,’ her brother said. Hajj! As usual she was not informed about any of his plans. Which schools their children would attend, their university applications and their wedding preparations were all unilaterally decided by him and she was merely informed about matters way after everyone else knew about it. Yet she was not angry now. On the contrary she was elated and immediately decided to put on hold her intention to separate and rather fulfil her lifelong dream.



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During the days preceding Hajj she obeyed most of his instructions. She was not allowed to pray her compulsory prayers behind the Imam of the Haram as according to her husband the Imam was not her custodian. She only went to the Haram when he took her for a Tawaaf or to sit there with him around. Ironically she was allowed to go shopping on her own! ‘There is one intention that I shall perform Doc,’ she told me. ‘My grandparents and my parents spoke of how they stood on Arafat outside their tents at the time of Wuqoof and the indescribable spiritual reach they had to their Creator at that time. My husband says women should stay in their tents on Arafat as prayers there are accepted as well. I have decided that no matter what, I shall do it.’ I asked her whether I should request one of

the learned scholars who belonged to the same Mathab as her husband to speak to him but she declined, fearing his anger.

Now on Arafat she stood under a tree and he stood just outside his tent. I had related the story to the scholar but also stressed that I was requested not to intervene. I saw this Imam walking to the husband and joined them. The Imam stood with his back to the wife and seemed oblivious of her whereabouts. ‘How I wish my wife was here,’ he lamented. Both he and myself were there as workers and our beloved spouses were keeping us in their prayers at home.

‘How I wish she was here and we both could stand reaching out to our Creator. How I wish I could hold her hand now and we could make a collective Duaa for our parents, children, family, loved ones and the Umah. I am sure you agree Doc,’ he added. I nodded in the affirmative, fully aware of his intentions. ‘Holding your spouse’s hand is permitted in your Mathab as it does not affect your Wudhu. I cannot do that because I then have to go running for water!’ I joked.

We chatted a bit and the Imam pointed to a couple crying, clearly overcome by emotions, another family embracing in a small circle. ‘Everyone here is on an individual level trying to converse with their Creator. We however are all here collectively as one Umah and Allah smiles on all of us. We are here as one nation as well, as one Hajj group and as families and couples. These are moments that have so much meaning when shared,’ the Imam said. He greeted and sauntered off and I followed him. The husband stood for a few minutes and then walked towards his wife. We noticed that he seemed much calmer and subdued. I am not certain whether she was aware of his presence. He raised his hands and started praying. AllahuAkbar!

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