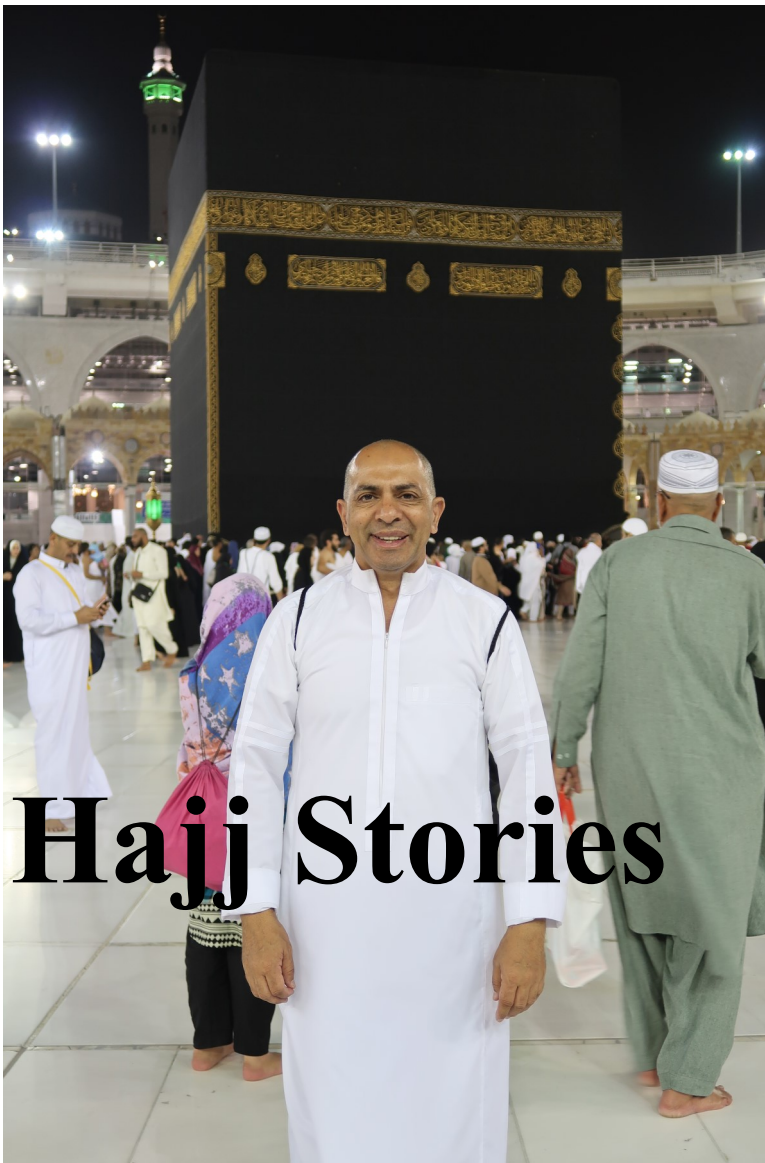


No hurdle too high for Hajj: Part 2



Hajj Stories

Dr Salim Parker

I first met her at the airport as we were to depart for Hajj. Her smiling demeanour belied the thin and frail body ravaged by terminal cancer. She sat in her wheelchair and was accompanied by her husband and his sister, all three having received their courtesy Hajj visas a few

room a few weeks earlier, money painstaking put away for the sole purpose of obeying the command of our Creator. I was informed about her by a person who was instrumental in helping them in every step of their journey. I introduced myself to them as a doctor who would be hon-

We discussed some of her medical and physical concerns there and then at the airport. I reassured her that no matter what, she would be able to complete her Hajj as long as she followed our advice of not exerting herself and seeking immediate medical attention if she was unwell. We spoke of the infinite mercies that Allah bestows on us even during the physically demanding journey of our pilgrimage. Of course everyone wants to be on Mina on the first day of Hajj, scale Jabal Rahmah on the day of Wuqoof at Arafat, sleep over the second night into the third morning at Musdalifah, and pelt the Jamarats for three days thereafter. But our Creator allows plenty of Mercies and the only absolute is to be present, even if for a mere moment, on Arafat on the second day of Hajj. I was aware that she entered our Deen at great family cost and Hajj was her final wish in life. 'I'll make sure you reach Arafat, even if you have to be carried till there,' I promised her. 'I'll hold you to that,' she smiled.

When we reached Makkah she was only using pain medication. This was a double-edged sword in that she was allergic to one that relieved her pain nearly totally without affecting her mental faculties. We played

the five days of Hajj dawned. I saw her on Mina on the first day. She had a bit of pain, but nothing that was not bearable. Medically she was stable. Emotionally and spiritually she was as ready as any super fit pilgrim. 'Tomorrow is going to be the apex of your life when we get to Arafat. I was confident that you will get there and now nothing can stop you,' I said.

When we reached Arafat the next morning, I went up to her and her husband. 'I kept my pledge to ensure you get here,' I said. 'I am now fulfilled my Amanat, the trust you put in me' I added. They thanked me profusely and the day proceeded with me having to attend to a number of patients. Late that afternoon her husband frantically came to look for me. 'She is not well,' he said. He apologised for bothering for what he perceived him bothering me. 'I know Doc said that you kept your promise to ensure that she gets to Arafat, but she suddenly became very sick,' he said. It

loved ones and her newly established extended circle of friends. She indicated, through very soft whispers, that she would prefer staying on Arafat. 'Will you be able to treat me,' she pleadingly asked. We could not disappoint her, and a team effort ensured that she did not need to be hospitalised. She made it back to Mina via Musdalifah, and all the obligatory rituals of her Hajj were completed. Her recovery was remarkable. We all made Duaa that Allah accepts her Hajj and the Hajj of everyone else who made the same Niyah.

Her journey was not completed yet. They still wanted to visit the City of Peace, Madinah. I left for South Africa by the time they reached the City of our Prophet (SAW) and, when she was afflicted by medical darkness in the City of Light, current communication abilities made it easy to lighten her burden. When she returned to South Africa the satisfaction, the glow of contentment, and the realisation that she accomplished the apex

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dawned on me that our duties do not stop with a particular endpoint. When a burst appendix is removed, the operated-on incision still needs to be cared for to ensure that no infection ensues, the pain of the surgery has to be managed and the incapacity of the patient properly understood and advised. The duties of the operators, the helpers and the doctors similarly are a continuum. 'No sick person can ever be a bother,' I replied, and we went to her tent.

It was a very hot day and heat related diseases are common in such conditions and can be fatal. She had heat exhaustion and pneumonia, the latter a frequent cause of the rapid deterioration in the health of the elderly and cancer sufferers. We call pneumonia the 'Captain of the Men of Death' and 'The friend of the aged as it kills them gently without severe symptoms'. Our dilemma was that if we sent her to hospital she would have been in a completely strange environment far removed from her

journey in the life of any Muslim was evident to all. That it was achieved with all the obstacles that she encountered made the achievement all the more remarkable. She was indeed growing spiritually and emotionally. However, the cancer was eroding her resistance, gnawing away at the little flesh still attached to her bone, and making it abundantly clear that she would soon be recalled to higher honours.

I saw her a week later, her body writhing with pain despite the potent painkillers that was given to her. She barely recognised anyone and had to be helped with the most basic functions. I visited her again a few days later and had to unfortunately confirm the husband's fear that she would not be on this temporary abode for much longer. She passed away the next day. I only knew her for two months, but it felt like a much longer time. It was my privilege and honour to accompany her on the eternal journey of a lifetime.

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The determination to perform Hajj will always prevail as the invitation is from our Creator

days before the last batch of pilgrims were to depart. There was no evidence of the anxiety present that you would expect in someone whose husband had been violently robbed of their hard earned Hajj money whilst she was asleep in an adjacent

oured to assist if necessary. Little would we all know that the next few weeks would be an eye opener for me and, because of the trust she had in me, I needed to ensure that her health would be optimal by the time she reached Arafat.

around with her medication until she was relatively pain and side-effects free, and she was extremely thankful for being able, in her physically limited way, to appreciate her sojourns to the Haram. She had one or two easily sorted medical issues before