

# Hajj Stories

## Cleansing the heart

May 2019



### Dr Salim Parker

‘Please stand in front and lead us in Salaah,’ I requested of Akbar\* (\*not his real name). We had congregated in large prayer

number of Imams with them, it was customary to request different people to lead the prayers. Often scholars from different



On Musdalifah they were drawn by a most inspiring voice, the voice of Akbar

hall in a hotel in Azizya just outside Makkah. It was a few days before Hajj and the hotel had over two hundred pilgrims housed in it, with provisions for Salaah facilities spread over an entire floor. It was Maghrib and a number of pilgrims fasted that day, a Thursday and had just ended the fast with dates and zam-zam water. The first day of Hajj was three days away and already the excitement was palpable. Though the group had a

groups would be present and then they would be asked to honour the group by leading the prayers. I, as the group doctor, was chatting to the resident Imam when I noticed Akbar and extended my request. Akbar looked startled. It was evident that he was caught unawares. ‘No, I am not able to,’ he replied. The Imam stepped forward and commenced the Salaah.

A few days earlier I had to see a bedridden patient in the same hotel. Akbar, with two other pilgrims, shared a room with him. When I got to the room the door was half open, in anticipation of my arrival. A clear melodious voice was very audible, reciting Surah Yaseen, the heart of the Quran. There was intensity, passion, dedication and heart in the rendition. I stood a while in the doorway and listened, appreciative of the words revealed to our beloved Prophet (SAW) more than fourteen hundred years ago. I saw Akbar sitting on his bed, reciting verse after verse. My prospective patient was sitting propped up in his bed, tears evident on his cheeks, and I only entered the room after Akbar finished the Surah. I greeted and Akbar started putting away his Quran. ‘Please continue with your recital,’ I said. ‘My medication can in no ways compare to the healing powers of the words of our Creator,’ I continued.

‘See, our patient is driven to tears of joy,’ I added. ‘No Doc, he is sweating due to his infection,’ Akbar humbly protested, clearly aware that his assertion was not true. I smiled and proceeded to talk to and examine my patient. Akbar recommenced his recital and this was clearly soothing to my patient, who remarked how blessed he was to have such good roommates. One of them came to call me out of concern, another went to buy them all lunch, and Akbar was soothing his soul. ‘And now I have the Doc here to get me completely well,’ he smiled. I thanked him for his kind words and prescribed the relevant medication. ‘Shall I be fine by Hajj time?’ he half pleaded. ‘Of course!’ I responded. ‘You have the best of roommates, you have a very treatable condition and you have medication. All you need to do is to rest. Give us three days of rest, and we’ll give you five days of Hajj,’ quoting a standard line that we use year after year. I greeted and took my leave.

After Maghrib that night when Akbar declined to lead us in

prayer, I set off for Makkah. I make every effort to perform one Tawaaf a day whilst in Azizya and generally find that the Hujjaaj are settled after sunset and normally are not in need of medical attention, making it the ideal time for me to perform Tawaaf around the Kaba’a, the act of worship that cannot be performed anywhere else in the world. As I exited the building, Akbar ran up to me. He was aware that I was going to Makkah. ‘May I join you?’ he asked politely. ‘Of course,’ I replied. We jumped onto a bus transporting Iranians in Ihram who welcomed us on board and ab-

“My medication can in no ways compare to the healing powers of the words of our Creator”

solutely refused to take any money. They were all excited about performing their first Umrah, having arrived in Saudi a few hours earlier. Both of us got deeply engaged with brothers with whom there is currently a lot of antagonism against. We reached Makkah and, amongst the vast crowds, completed our Tawaaf. ‘I need to chat to you Doc,’ he said.

We sat on the roof of the Haram from where we had an unobstructed view of the Kaba’a. The massive crowds thronged round after round in a slow but evidently orderly fashion and rhythmic manner around the cubic structure representing the centre of our worshipping universe. ‘I am sorry about this evening,’ he said. ‘I did not expect anyone to ever ask me to stand in front.’ I reassured him that all was in order and expressed my surprise that he was so taken aback. I expressed my admiration for his beautiful recitation of the Quran and indicated that he should not be shy to ever lead prayers. I reminded him of my visit to his room where his prayers were in effect enhancing the recovery of the sick. ‘Doc, I only started reciting recently, and only I was a bad person before that. I am definitely not good enough to be a leader in prayer.’

‘Look at the Hujjaaj down there,’ I said pointing to the thousands circumambulating the Kaba’a. Only Allah knows how

good or bad they were. What is important is what they are now,’ I replied. I then compared my role as a doctor. Irrespective of how acutely aware I was of my shortcomings, I could not deny any patient my services. We doctors always know that medicine is an ever-expanding discipline and no one will ever know everything. ‘You are denying us of something truly inspirational. Even if one person becomes more aware of his Deen you will be rewarded,’ I replied. He did not respond and we, after about an hour of talking about his past, made our way back to our hotel.

The first day of Hajj soon arrived. I saw Akbar sitting in the tent on Mina. There was none of the confident and melodious voice to be heard. Instead he recited silently or partook in discussions with others. The same happened on Arafat. At one stage, just after Wuqoof, some of the gifted were praying aloud and virtually everyone in the tent joined in. I encouraged him to join as well but he politely declined. That evening a large group of us walked from Arafat to Musdalifah. Even though we moved as one, it was impossible, due to the large crowds and due to different stamina levels for all to collectively combine our Maghrib and Eshai prayers. Some needed the bathroom, some simply needed to rest, whilst others hurried to get done.

‘If our intentions were pure, Allah surely has forgiven us all our sins,’ the Imam said. He, along with myself, was one of the last who still had to perform the combined prayers. I recited the Iqama, and a melodious voice soon commenced the prayer. Soon a group of Indonesians who just arrived there joined us. By the time both prayers were finished some Turks and a scattering of different nationalities formed part of the congregation. They were drawn by a most inspiring voice, the voice of Akbar.

salimparker@yahoo.com