

Hajj Stories

Whose Forgiveness Counts?

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“‘God may forgive but I don’t.’ The words stabbed at the core of the soul of Yusuf* and he was filled with a desperate sense of despair. What more could he do in his efforts for redemption? He admitted his crime, he fully compensated his victim and in fact ensured a more than fair settlement. That was more than a decade ago and he had come to greet the person he thought had forgiven him for his misdemeanour before embarking on Hajj. Hajj, the ultimate journey which all want to commence with a sense that all debts are settled, that all previous animosities and disagreements are amicably and in a mature manner worked through. He made every effort to go and meet anyone who could possibly have been aggrieved by his previous lifestyle. He pledged that if anyone claimed that he still owed them he would immediately settle any debt there and then. He certainly did not expect the response from the very last person he greeted.

‘Nothing you do will ever be enough to right your wrong, I am still suffering and need more than you forwarded to get out of my misery,’ Yusuf was told, and he again parted with some more money. Every time he made

contact with this person he paid, again. Yusuf told me about this incident when he came to my rooms for his compulsory vaccinations. He was not from our city and related about his previous unsavoury activities. ‘I was no angel Doc. I started a get quickly rich scheme and initially it flourished. I made promises of very high returns on investments over a very short period of time with the chance of doubling your money within a year or two. It was portrayed as a completely Islamically acceptable concept and a number of Muslims invested. I admit to marketing it as being a low risk venture but also indicated that it was for those who had some extra cash,’ he explained.

He went on to add that most of the investors were rich people who had the cash money on hand though there were a few who borrowed in order to join. He particularly remembered an elderly couple who handed over their meagre Hajj savings so that they could embark on their Holy journey within a year instead of the previously projected five years. Another couple put in their

daughter’s education savings into his scheme in order to send her to a top university. When his unsustainable pyramid-like structure collapsed, more than half of the initial investors at least made some profit or got their money back. Those who got in last, like the Hajj investors, were going to lose all their money. It was this couple’s attitude that gave him a new insight into life.

‘We made our Niyah to perform Hajj,’ they told Yusuf. ‘We would dearly want our money back and leave it in Allah’s hands to help you sort out our financial woes.’ There was no threat of taking him to lawyers, or even a threat on his life like in other cases. ‘Doc, they made it clear that it was my responsibility to make amends but ultimately left it in the Hands of our Creator,’ Yusuf said. I was struck by the fact that Yusuf used the word ‘our’ and not ‘their Creator.’ He was a resourceful businessman and within two years wanted to send the couple on Hajj on a much better package than they planned for. They refused to take up that offer and instead insisted on sticking to the modest one that they planned. ‘Use the balance to settle some of your debts,’ they insisted. Each year some money is still depos-

Some insisted on some profit and settled for market related returns. One very wealthy person was adamant that Yusuf was going to hell unless he delivered on his initial projections and even this was settled. The student’s education money was returned and a very generous bursary was arranged for her when she was accepted at the university of her choice. I was amazed at the extent that Yusuf

convinced. ‘I want to be debt-free before I leave for Hajj,’ he said. ‘No,’ I replied, ‘you want to be guilt-free.’

He stared at me. ‘We all make mistakes. I erred in some of my diagnoses and then explained it to my patients. Most will accept it and do not move to other doctors. But you can never please everyone. We have two cousins with the same name and surname living in the same block of

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went to in order to settle his debts. He now had several very successful businesses and was indeed very wealthy. He went on a number of Umrahs but never felt ready to perform Hajj. Until now. And now, a week before departing for the apex of a Muslim’s life journey, he is told that he will not be forgiven. The perpetrator was now the victim and it seemed clear that the previous victim was now the perpetrator.

‘You know you are being taken for a ride,’ I said. ‘I cannot go on Hajj with such a sword hanging over my head,’ Yusuf said. I spent some time pointing out the obvious to him, that he had already paid this gentleman twice the promised original generous amount and that he was being

flats belonging to the same medical aid attending our practice. We inadvertently billed the wrong one once and within a day reversed the charges before the bill was paid. The one still accuses us of fraud and never returned despite our detailed explanations and apologies,’ I added.

He left for Hajj a few weeks before I did and since he did not contract any illnesses, I did not see him at all by the time we all left for Mina for the first day of Hajj. I saw him fleetingly there but was kept occupied by people with medical problems. I did note that he seemed extremely restless and was moving from one group of pilgrims to another. We left early the next morning for Arafat and I made some effort to get hold of him.



Arafat: Where all forgiveness counts

‘Those who don’t believe that Allah forgives the Hujjaaj who sincerely repent on this day should not be on Arafat,’ we heard one of the learned Sheikhs say. ‘Do you believe you’ll be forgiven?’ I asked him. He replied with some hesitancy in the affirmative. ‘You should not even think about the man who claims that he is unable to forgive and consider it as one of your life’s anomalies. In fact, he should be asking you to make duaa for him that he’ll be forgiven for exploiting you,’ I said. ‘I wronged him first,’ Yusuf responded.

‘Yes, and now it is time to forgive yourself. Allah surely shall forgive all who sincerely reach out to him now,’ I replied.

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ited anonymously into their account by him. Their investment in faith is still paying dividends.

Yusuf made arrangements to pay back all other affected parties and most were happy to get their initial investment back.

used as an easy source of income. I also pointed out that the man involved was not poor and definitely did not suffer any financial loss. He might have had some inconvenience at the very most. Yusuf, for all his financial savviness, was not yet