

We are all equal on Arafah



We mere mortals were to make way for some royalty merrily clicking selfies on their cell phones, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

'I WORSHIP the same Creator as them. I pray in the same direction as them and, in fact, I often stand shoulder to shoulder with them, ensuring that none of Satan's sinister subjects can slavishly slip in between us.'

'We all take our lead from our same Beloved Muhammad (SAW) and all read from the same Quran. The Kaabah belongs to me as much as every other Muslim. Yet, here we are, standing in front of the House of Allah, and we are being made to feel like the filth of the earth, to be treated with utter disdain, disrespect and disgust,' he complained to me.

I could not respond, as the two of us, together with thousands of others, were hounded away from where we stood quite close to the Kaabah. We mere mortals were to make way for some royalty merrily clicking selfies on their cell phones perched on elongated selfie sticks. These mobile phones were afforded more protection by the battalion of soldiers surrounding, guarding and leading the royal pack than the hapless geriatrics who were being shoved out of the way.

'Are we children of a lesser sect of Islam?' he more stated than asked. The two of us had finished our tawaaf and were trying to pray as close to the Kaabah as we could when the commotion took place. We completed our prayers elsewhere and started walking towards our hotel.

'You know Doc, this is a recurrent pattern. In Madinah, when I stood in front of the qabr of our beloved Prophet (SAW) and conveying the salaams of those who requested it of me, the guards rudely shouted at me to move along. I can understand if its full and if I were obstructing the flow of pilgrims but it was relatively

quiet!

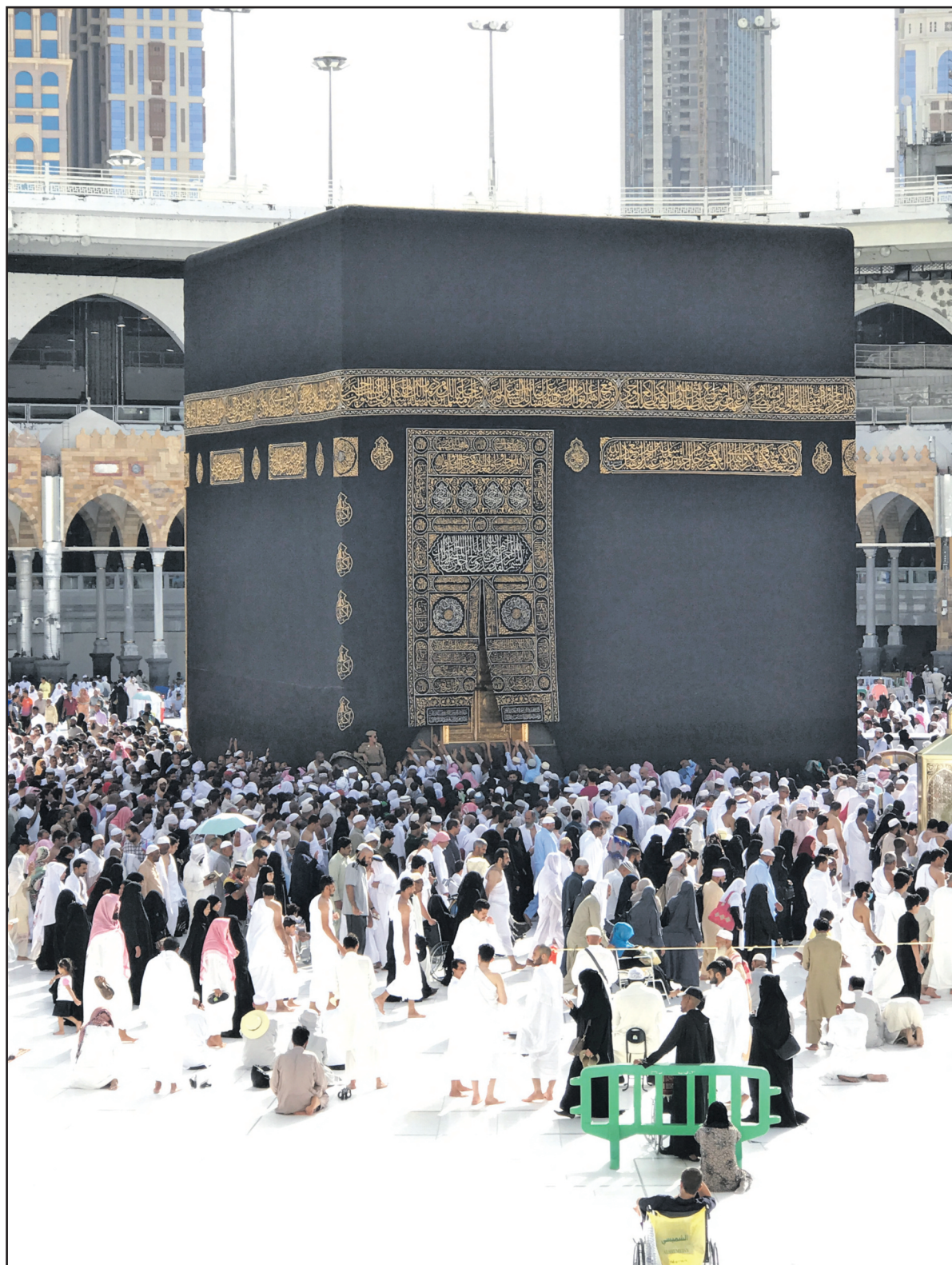
'However, when a group of scholars did the same as me, not a word of objection was raised. In fact, they crowded the area and caused significant problems as pilgrims could not get past them. What was done? Nothing! It is my Prophet (SAW) as much as theirs!' he complained.

I thought back to when our hujaaj arrived in Arabia. South Africans are of the first to arrive for Hajj and are received with much fanfare with gifts, flowers and Qurans liberally dished out. This is all under the ever-present press and television cameras showcasing the hosts' generosity to the rest of the world.

The print, television and social media were ablaze with how the guests of Allah were honoured in the land where an orphan and, at times, social outcast had, against all odds, risen to demonstrate to the world the power of truth, love, humility and generosity.

The guests of Allah are the special few who respond to the call rendered thousands of years ago by Nabi Ibrahim (AS) summoning us all to fulfil the fifth pillar of Islam. We see Madinah as part of us. We visit Masjidul Qiblatain, where Allah ordered our beloved Prophet (SAW), in mid-salaah, to change the Qibla from Jerusalem to Makkah and we have followed suit because we are part of that same ummah.

We all visit Uhud and feel the defeat inflicted upon all of us for being disobedient to the instructions of Nabi Muhammad (SAW). Whenever we are in the City of Light and Peace, we feel one with our deen. And so does the Muslim travelling from Indonesia, Pakistan, Canada, Nigeria and England. In Makkah, the feeling is the same so why are we being treated



When we are on Hajj, we are the guests of Allah but when the guests of the rulers visit, we are treated like lesser beings who have to give way while the 'royal guests' are given special treatment around the Kaabah. Photo SALIM PARKER

so differently, as if there is one set of rules and standards for one sector of Muslims and something else for the rest of us who would soon be on Arafah where the Prophet (SAW), in his final khutbah, proclaimed equality between all Muslims?

We would soon be standing on that vast plain where Allah, through the Prophet (SAW), revealed that: 'This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you.'

The indifferent treatment meted out in no small measure to many of the overseas hujaaj bothered my friend. 'Sometimes, it's an us versus them situation,' he once remarked as we watched some pilgrims trying to get a close look at the Maqaam Ibrahim. The security personnel tried their utmost to not let anyone get close to it while the religious police shouted that it is an innovation for pilgrims to touch the structure on which Nabi Ibrahim (AS) stood at one stage while he and Nabi Ismail (AS) were building the Kaabah.

Who can blame those fascinated by the history of our religion to want a glimpse of what was truly a stepping stone in our deen? Millions come from many thousands of miles away on probably their only ever sojourn to the holy

lands. They want to touch, feel, participate, live and re-live as much of what they were taught.

Those moments during Hajj will not only be for their own cherished memories. It will be relayed to the many eagerly waiting at home, to feed the hunger and the desire to embark on the ultimate journey in the life of any Muslim. The current ambassadors will pass on the relay baton for the following generations.

'You know Doc, I cannot wait for the days of Hajj to come,' he lamented. 'Yes, I am having an absolutely fulfilling journey despite my, at times, negative experiences. No one can take away the experience of following in Hajar's footsteps when I ran between Safa and Marwah. I followed the example of a black female who was previously a slave! That is as great a leveller as I can ever imagine,' he added. 'No,' I replied. 'The greatest leveller is yet to come. When the time of Wuqoof on Arafah arrives, it will only be the start of the rest of our lives. How we view it and what we take away from it is going to be entirely dependent on our state of minds,' I added.

'Let me start by making duah that those who discriminate against others be shown that we are all equal,' he replied.

We arrived on Arafah where there was no perceivable difference between all of us in ihraam. 'I am truly at home now,' he said. 'I feel now that I am part of these vast plains, that every grain of sand knows that I am here, just as everyone else is equally acknowledged, no matter from which corner of the globe they commenced their journey.' The officials seemed more kind, more cooperative and more helpful than ever before. It seemed that the heat had melted away any antagonism on the part of the officials, and the spirit of Hajj had warmed the pilgrims to be more engaging.

Just before Maghrib, before we were to flow away from Arafah towards Musdalifah, he came to see me for some medical condition. Dishevelled, covered by dust that a slight breeze had dispensed onto his ihraam, he still smiled.

'We all belong here,' he said. 'Not only are we all equal, we are as close to our Creator now as will ever be possible. These plains belong equally to all of us. Yes, it is in Saudi Arabia but this place, at this time, belongs to all Muslims. Labaik!'

For more Hajj Stories visit www.hajjdoctor.co.za. You may contact Dr Parker via e-mail: salimparker@yahoo.com