

Hajj Stories

Ties that forever bind

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Dr Salim Parker

*When there is no time to smile,
Will a mother smile at her child?*

*A mother's heart will always smile,
In her soul resides eternal time for
her child.*

'I am going to admit you to hospital. You are severely depressed and not coping with issues at work and at home,' I said. Farida* smiled. 'No, you are not. I am leaving for Hajj in a month's time and have a myriad of matters to manage. I also need to finish my second job to pay Insaaf*, my daughter's university fees before I leave,' she replied. I was well aware of her background. She did not get the promotion that she strived hard for at work, with a relatively inexperienced but vivacious and go-getting competitor getting the nod. That promotion would have ensured financial security but was clearly not going to happen. A single parent, she raised Insaaf to really have what she thought the best a child could wish for. The best of schools, extra tuition and a nurturing environment. Insaaf failed some first year university subjects but did well enough to

be allowed to continue and was now in her final year.

This added an extra unbudgeted university year to Farida's carefully laid out plans, the year she was going for Hajj. Throughout this time she constantly encouraged her daughter and was happy that she would be attending the graduation upon her return from Hajj. But she toiled to make ends meet for the extra year's fees, opting to have an absolutely budget Hajj package and taking on an extra job in order to make ends meet. 'I have a good, hardworking daughter,' she said. 'I just wish that she would appreciate the efforts I make for us.' Insaaf has been my patient since birth and I knew both of them quite well. 'Where is Insaaf now?' I deliberately asked. 'Oh, she is at home, probably getting supper ready,' was the response. 'So she is not at the festival for final year students?' I asked redundantly. I then gently spoke of the times that Insaaf would rather do household chores instead of accepting invitations to lavish parties. We chatted about Farida's depression and worked out a plan of action. And no hospitalisation.

Insaaf came to see me a few days later. She, by her own admission, was not the brightest of students but her resolve to reward her mother for all she did drove her to study maniacally at times. She struggled academically in her first year with compulsory subjects, but she was now only doing subjects that stimulated her immensely. It was paying dividends and she was going to be starting her guaranteed dream job the following year as her results in her current final year were very good. Her plan was to be working this year already, the year her mom was going for Hajj but Allah willed otherwise. Still she was teaching some first year students and earning some money which she religiously put away. 'That is for spending money for my mom for her Hajj,' she told me.

After we addressed her medical issues, she started talking about her mother. 'Sometimes I wish she would spend more time with me,' she said. I always go on holiday with my family but my mom is never with as she is working.' I wanted to tell her that her mom could not afford to accompany her, that she worked double shifts just to ensure that

more than her mother's love. They sacrificed for each other without pouring their hearts out. I was privy to their souls but was requested by Farida never to divulge anything we discussed to her daughter.

On occasion Insaaf would tell her mom that her friends brought some food to campus and she really was not hungry supper time. Not true. She wanted to ensure that Farida had a good meal and would then devour the leftovers, saying that

'Here on Arafat, there was no distance between them, the umbilical cord that binds in the mother's womb never to be severed.'

she may just as well clean the dishes with her tongue. Despite her mother's attempts to hide her hardships, Insaaf instinctively knew when times were hard. Umbilical blood flows in both directions. Farida would on Eid days say that she could not in all the shops find an outfit that she liked or was her size and that she'll wear the same one as the year before. Again subtle untruths. She wanted her daughter to look ravishing. It was done out of love, deep affection and care, with thoughts only for the other without concern for the self.



Insaaf could have the same luxurious trips that her cousins embarked on. There were times when Farida would deprive herself of everything except the absolutely basics to live in order for Insaaf to have what Farida thought her daughter wanted. It was one of the ironic situations where a mother was giving so much to a daughter who deep in her heart really wanted little

'You know that your mom loves coffee,' I said. 'Ask her to meet you after work at the café close to her work and just chat. Also buy yourself your favourite chocolate muffin at the same place. It is cheap there but delicious,' I added. 'Why do you say that Doc?' she asked. 'You two live for each other but exist parallel to each other. It seems that you try so hard to enlighten the other's life that you don't

seem to realise that soft gentle rays emanate from both of you. For once do things together and live for the moment. Your Mom is going to commence the most important journey of her life very soon. Don't just make the Hajj easy for her; be part of every step.' She divulged the amount she saved for her mom's journey and I realized that it almost equaled the fees that Farida was desperately working for.

I saw Farida in Makkah a week

before Hajj was due to commence. She proudly showed me two Islamic dresses she bought. 'One for Insaaf and one for me,' she smiled. 'See, I did not just buy something for her alone, I am going to look like her younger sister when I wear this!' she added mischievously. 'You know Doc, we are closer to each other now than ever before.' It dawned on me that they must have had an intimate discussion before she left the shores of South Africa. I felt immensely blessed to have been part of their journey. Sometimes a journey achieves before it even has commenced.

Hajj dawned on us and millions of us made our way to Mina, following in the footsteps that binds us to our forefathers. The next day I saw her standing during the time of Wuqoof, the apex and pinnacle of Hajj, on Arafat. The time and place where our Creator stretches out unlimited mercies. Her hands were outstretched, reaching out for her Lord and it was evident that she was engaged in deep prayer. Tears were flowing, each tear wrote volumes as it scribed down her cheeks. Each sob orated poems of deep-seated love and affection. Each exhaled breath transmitted more messages than the millions of air particles that was inspired. They were thousands of miles apart. Yet, here on Arafat, there was no distance between them, the umbilical cord that binds in the mother's womb never to be severed.

*not their real names

salimparker@yahoo.com