

# Hajj Stories

## Renewing an ancient call of our Deen

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### Dr Salim Parker

‘I was a Muslim for eleven years, yet I knew very little about Islam,’ she told me. We were part of a walking group led by experienced fitness instructors whose aim was to ensure that all participants would be able to comfortably accomplish the demanding physical rituals of Hajj. A number of pilgrims have a rather romanticised notion of the most important journey in the life of a Muslim being mostly spiritual, emotional and sentimental. There is now a growing awareness that, due to millions crowding the limited spaces and all trying to perform the same rituals in the same specified sequence in the scorching Saudi Arabian summer, that it is indeed an immensely physical journey as well. The aim of the Fit for Hajj programme in Cape Town was to gradually over a few months increase the walking capability of the prospective pilgrims so that they could cover the distances and times involved during the actual days of Hajj.

It was a cold winter’s morning and I relished the chilly wind impeding the physical efforts whilst simultaneously refreshingly uplifting our spirits. Though the weather here at

home was a far cry from the furnace-like heat that was likely to be experienced during the Hajj, the spirit of families bond-



Walking locally in preparation for walking on the plains of Arafat

ing, which blooms in its full glory on Arafat, was already in its infancy blossoming. She worked a night shift at a local hospital and thereafter immediately came to join us who had the benefit of a good night’s rest. ‘I want to get the most of the exercises,’ she said. We advised her to not to exert herself

and only join us when she feels well. ‘Do not worry Doc, I feel very well!’ she said as the group picked gradually increased the pace without compromising the efforts of anyone. As we walked, she started telling me her story.

She was not a Muslim until she got married and she reverted. Her knowledge of Islam was limited to what she learnt from her Muslim husband. This was not much, if anything at all. There were Muslim names, Islamic relics and traditions and customs associated with Cape Town. ‘Doc, there was no real talk of Salaah, of prayers and of giving attention to the five pillars of Islam,’ she told me. I reflected on how often we see this in practice. Where someone is brought into the fold of this beautiful religion but is then not shown the inherent splendour of our Deen. Instead many revert to Islam so that society will accept their marriage to a born Muslim who may on occasion not be a practicing one. She worked, was a wife, a cook, a companion and ultimately a mother to two children. The off-

spring were raised with Muslim names but not much more.

Eleven years on and her husband decided to marry again. Her marriage was terminated. He life was shattered. She was now back with her family with very little support from her adopted Muslim family and community. Her family always

accepted her as their own and she had a chance to assimilate herself back into their structures. It would have been so easy for her to erase eleven years of her life, consider it as a learning passage and live the life of a Christian again. But something has been stirred in her over more than a decade. A seed has been planted, it merely needed the winter frost to be gently warmed by the spring thaw for it to germinate and to ready itself to blossom and then finally bloom in all its glory.

‘Please pray for me when you attend church,’ was her request to her family. ‘I’ll pray for you

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when I perform Salaah and make my Duaas,’ she added. She knew that the road would not be easy as her knowledge of Islam was rudimentary. ‘Sometimes I just wanted to give up Doc,’ she related. She started attending classes. It appeared that she very much doubted herself and for some reason deemed herself at times not worthy of being a Muslim. ‘I learnt the Duaas and all the basics and it took a lot of effort. I then made up my mind to perform Hajj but I am so scared of doing the wrong things Doc,’ she continued. I could completely understand her emotions. It does not matter how committed, how knowledgeable and experienced someone may be when embarking on the ultimate journey in the life of a Muslim; the fear of not obtaining the forgiveness of our Creator always lingers in the back of our minds. I have been experiencing that uncertainty for nineteen consecutive years.

I related what a wise elderly Sheigh once related to me. ‘Allah has indicated that all those who sincerely repent on the plains of Arafat are forgiven. Doubting that would be doubting the words of our Creator. In fact more are forgiven on the Day of Wuqoof than at any other time, and Allah’s capacity to forgive far exceeds the capacity to punish. We have to deeply appreciate these favours and sincerely believe that our prayers are going to be answered

when we execute our once in a lifetime obligation. So once the intention is made to perform Hajj all actions should be in anticipation that the infinite favours of our Creator will be showered on us as we make our way from the spiritual high of Arafat to the dishevelled state we find ourselves in under the open star studded night sky of Musdalifah.’ I shall never forget those words and she listened intensely.

‘I have been trying to convince my son to learn more about our beautiful Deen and to actively involve his spouse and child,’ she said. ‘Perhaps I am hasty for

him to not lose out for years like I did. He said that he could see the positive effects my renewed involvement with our way of life is having on me but he does not want to rush and force his family. Insha-Allah he’ll also follow a similar path to me,’ she added. By this time we had walked for more than one and a half hours. ‘We have nearly covered the distance from Arafat to Musdalifah without any real effort!’ I said to the group. Most of them were walking with ease, and could clearly continue for at least another hour at least. We were comfortable that they would physically be completely prepared for the journey.

She still expressed doubts about being fully prepared for the journey and I knew that the adrenalin associated with this uncertainly fuels all of us to humbly try and be favoured positively by our Lord. Deep down I knew she was fully prepared. She was prepared the day she decided to fulfil the obligatory fifth pillar of Islam as her heart and soul yearned for it. It was now merely for her to perform the associated rituals to the best of her abilities. Even if anyone errs unwittingly whilst performing it, Allah allows so many compensatory gifts that no matter what, the prayers will be accepted. Once she stands on Arafat our Creator will smile down on her and all others and gift them to depart the plains as sinless as a newborn child. Labaik!

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