

Hajj Stories

In honour of a Father

June 2020



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He looked so at peace. He had minutes ago breathed in his final breath and seemed to be at a very leisurely pace and content manner exhaling any minute particles that might still have disturbed his acceptance that his Creator had finally recalled him. Those present were all grateful that his departure was so graceful, that there was no suffering and that many could say their farewell. The only evidence of the ninety two years that he spent on this temporary abode was the evident wisdom radiating from his still warm face. His was still propped up in his bed, with his head at a slight forward angle as if nodding approval of his fate. I saw him the day before and we all knew that the sun was gradually setting on him. Now that Allah's will has dawned on him I reflected on the will of his son to ensure that the blessings of the fifth pillar of Islam would also embrace the elder before his departure.

About thirty minutes prior to his gentle soul exiting his physical body his daughter-in law called from her hospital bed. I recalled that the last time he was in hospital she used to travel there in order to feed him with her own hands. When she used to enter

his ward it was as if the bright rays of joy and love danced in with her. Now her body was too weak and too afflicted with sepsis and cancer to be treated at home, and she could not bid her farewell with her physical presence. It was unprecedented times, with the covid pandemic precluding anyone visiting her. She had many who would sit for days next to her bed willingly comforting her and attending to her every need, just like she used to do for him. Now she was all alone in hospital but she wanted to greet him. He did not observably respond to her words, but we all know that our Creator works in mysterious ways and would have ensured that her parting Duaas were heard. Just like Allah ensured that the Tawaaf his son pledged to perform on his behalf was heard and seen by him, as was the Wuqoof on Arafat in fulfillment of his debt to Allah.

'We need to talk,' my practice partner said just less than a year after he performed his obligatory Hajj. He was and still is an amazing person. The only arguments we ever had in our thirty years of medical practice was when the one urged the other to

go home and rest when not well. For more than fifteen consecutive years, as soon as I received a Hajj visa, he would as the self-proclaimed senior practice partner instruct me to take first available flight to Saudi Arabia. Of course the only condition was that I should keep him and his family in my Duaas. And he always specifically mentioned that I should keep his father in my prayers. His father worked double shifts to feed his large family and was the proverbial provider for many decades. He may not have been present in the lives of his children all the time but he was working and providing all the time. When he retired, his gradually developing arthritis had eroded his joints and he was severely immobilized. In his latter years he could barely walk unaided and at times needed assistance even with dressing. There was no ways that he could travel. It was not possible for him to physically perform Hajj.

'I would really want to perform Hajj on behalf of my father,' my partner said. I silently smiled. He never fully grasped why I was drawn to the ultimate once in a lifetime journey year after year, decade after decade. He never ever questioned it though

honour, an acknowledgment of the gratitude he felt, and a serious entrustment to don the Ihram in his father's name. I could of course never deny him the privilege and told him to decide on his departure date. The previous year when he went for his Fard Hajj I was supposed to stay at home and see to our practice. Fate intervened and I managed to continue my annual sojourn. We again decided that I should stay for that particular year. We reflected on that and then he smiled. 'As I know you I won't be surprised to see you there,' he laughed. He was so right.

Many find technology a hindrance and an impediment to the

travel to there ignited. In the son's case he definitely used it as perfectly as was humanely possible.

When the son first entered Makkah, he video called his father. The younger one was the one focusing his camera on the Kabaa, and his legs were circumambulating the center of the Islamic universe. The senior far away in Cape Town was glued to his chair, but seeing with his eyes, and making Duaa with his heart. I don't know who shed more tears. I know both felt extremely grateful and blessed. The one in Makkah felt honoured to be there on behalf of his father and the one in South

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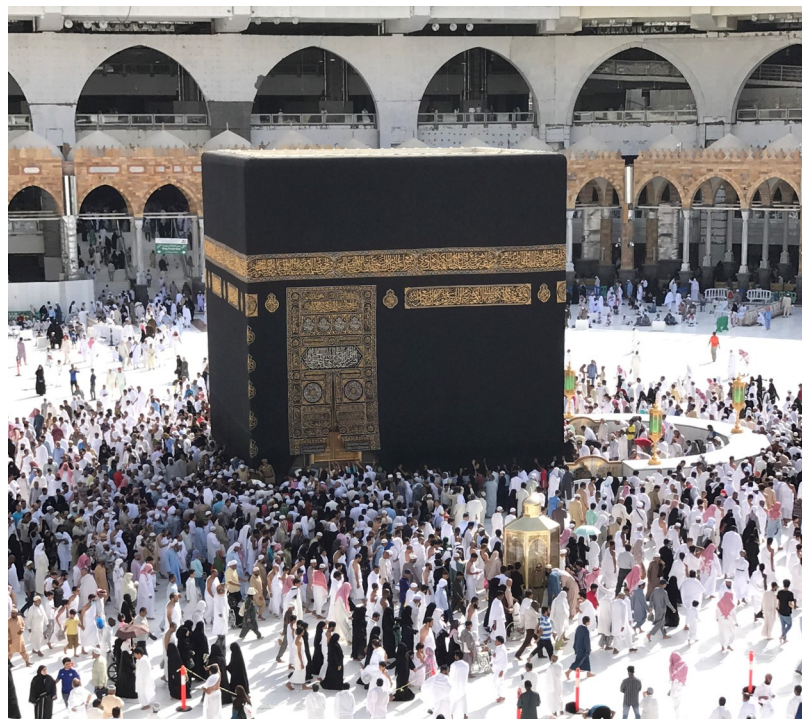
performance of our spiritual duties. Tawaaf is often performed more with camera and mobile phone in hand than concentrating on the act of worship itself. I have witnessed the absurdity of someone circumambulating the Holy Kabaa on an electric hoverboard whilst texting on his mobile phone. But it also has its profound and at times much more nuanced uses. Hundreds of millions have the Hajj moments

Africa grateful that someone was completing the fifth pillar on his behalf. Arafat was but a few weeks away. When I arrived in Saudi Arabia a few days before Hajj was to start, I knew that two people who were thousands of miles apart were united as one soul ready to raise their arms in unison at the time of Wuqoof on Arafat.

We were on different camps during Hajj but I knew exactly what my partner was doing. The noble act has universal features. Initially the fear and anxiety when putting on the Ihram that you would forget something or do something incorrectly. The plea to your Creator not to punish your father for your imperfections. The request that Allah will reward your elder more than your limited mind can ask for and forgive him to the extent that he who is about ninety years old would be as sinless as a newborn child.

Now, as I stood next to the bed of the newly recalled by Allah, I saw two men truly blessed. The one who could step by step walk and pray on behalf of his father whilst performing a pilgrimage. The other who can proudly thank his Creator for gifting him with a truly remarkable son. Allahu-Akbar!

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It was the body of the son performing the Hajj, it was the Niyah and heart of the father making the Duaas

and sent me packing on the first flight annually as soon as I received my invitation. Now that he had just finished his Fard Hajj the yearning to go back was immense. To do it for his invalid father was going to be an

moved into their homes, their minds and their souls via live broadcasts. Those who have been there reminisce about their precious privilege, and those who have not been there yet have the fire of the yearn to