

# Hajj Stories

## True Stars Always Shine

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Sometimes the sun shines bright and of course stars are not visible despite some being millions of times more powerful than the one sustaining us in the centre of our solar system. Sometimes the moon, full and so low at the horizon that it seems one can touch it with outstretched hands once we reach just that bit further, dazzles the sparkle and twinkle of even the brightest star. At night, when the moon's lunar celestial body nudges between the sun and earth and the stars should be at their most majestic, dark clouds can obscure them. But the stars are always there. Ancient mariners were guided by their presence and reassured that the routes they were navigating would constantly be guided by them. These stars are mapped but frequently forgotten about when the splendours of daily rays and entrapments of nocturnal delights overwhelm. But when it is truly dark and all seems frighteningly bewildering, the stars shine brightly and we realise that they have been there all the time.

'You must come back to Madinah and also visit us,' she said. It was the first time I met the remarkable lady originally from South Africa who more than

forty years previously was invited to make Madinah her home. It was no ordinary invitation. She and her husband were blessed to be able to perform the ultimate journey that any Muslim can perform. Whilst in the Holy Land she had a dream where our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW) asked her to stay in Madinah. She and her husband had no formal paperwork at that time but they managed to stay. Foreigners normally have to leave Saudi Arabia by the end of their economically active life but they always were a constant presence in Madinah despite being octogenarians when I first met them. He was in a vegetative bedridden state needing unwavering attention for all his needs. Despite his permanent disabilities, he inevitably faced Kiblah at the time of the five daily prayers and I am convinced that he was performing his obligatory Salaahs.

She was sprightly and full of energy that day when she asked me to come back. I had just performed Hajj and it was one year that I did not manage to get to Madinah before the pilgrimage. The intense longing to just get to the Haram where our Prophet (SAW) was laid to rest was not-

ed by our operator and he conjured somehow to make a one day trip to the City of Light a reality. For me even an hour would have been a blessing and I shall forever be indebted to him. I got to Madinah and before I could even get to the Haram I was introduced to the remarkable couple. I made a medical assessment of the husband, at the request of a dear friend of mine, and after a brief chat with her, she could clearly sense my longing to get to visit Muhammad (SAW) and his Companions. 'Go greet our Prophet (SAW) and you must come back to Madinah and also visit me,' she said as I left. 'Of course I'll make sure that I visit soon,' I pledged.

They were people of a higher order, way beyond my limited comprehension. As we entered the Prophet's Mosque, my friend informed me that the woman had not been to the Haram for years. I felt a completely different person when I stepped foot into the mosque. The peace, the tranquility, the innate goodness of the inhabitants and the indescribable spirituality cannot be conveyed by phrase or prose and needs the physical presence there to be truly imbued by it. She lived a few kilometers away and it was initially inconceivable to me that she could not get to the Prophet's Mosque at least once a week. I did notice a number of people popping in and out of her dwelling during the very short time that I spent there. She also

took a few phone calls and I could not help overhearing her counselling at least two people in a warm and motherly manner.

'I am sure that someone will care for her husband whilst she comes to the Haram,' I said. My friend smiled and remarked that she taught two generations of

children to memorise the Quran. During his younger days her husband was known to have cooked pots of food for the underprivileged. They lived extremely frugally and survived on an absolutely minimum with any surplus to their requirements being donated to those they con-

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sidered in more need than them. 'I can see you offering some of your time to stay with him whilst she leaves for a short while,' I said. 'There is no shortage of any volunteers,' he said. I was baffled. Why would anyone not want to come greet our Beloved Prophet if not once daily or weekly, then at least once a month and even once a year.

'She does not want to ask her husband permission' my friend said. 'She knows that he would be unable to refuse her such a request but she is also concerned that deep in his heart he would not want her to leave his side. She has been his constant companion since he got bedridden

sorb that and realised that they, in reality, did not need to leave their home as they were an integral part of Madinah irrespective of where they found themselves. Distance was merely physical, there was no spiritual separation from the Prophet (SAW) that they revered.

I visited them every time I was in Madinah the following years. Her parting words inevitably were: 'You must come back to Madinah and also visit us.' I noted the gradual decline in her husband's health and the onset and spread of breast cancer in her. This seemed to increase her resolve to care for her husband and alliance continued within the precincts of the Haram. She was not going to succumb to the ravages of her widespread disease and my friend remarked that she would wait till her husband was no more before she herself would be recalled by our Creator.

I happened to be in Madinah a few days before my daughter's wedding at the end of last year and visited them. 'You must come back to Madinah,' she ended off. No mention of visiting them. 'Of course I'll come visit you,' I replied. 'You must come back to Madinah,' she repeated. I had a strange premonition but wanted to be proven wrong. I was invited to a conference a few months later and of course I would return for the Hajj! I should have known that the wise are gifted with extra-ordinary knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of my conference and soon thereafter her husband, the reason for winning her battle against cancer, passed away.

The great sadness of the curtailed Hajj due to the pandemic prevented my second trip. My sense of trepidation increased and I asked my Madinah friend to keep me informed. She was rapidly deteriorating until one day she was welcomed to the hereafter. The sun set, it was new moon and the skies were cloudless. Her star was, is and will forever shine.

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Many souls resting in Madinah are forever illuminating the paths we tread

and never left their premises. He is absolutely dependent on her and they live for each other. If the one passes away one day, the other will follow suit soon thereafter. So she does not ask him and he is hence not obligated to give an answer that may be contrary to his real feelings,' he explained. I had to sit down to ab-