

Hajj Stories

Live for me, live with me

February 2020



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‘When we just got married you said that you love me so much that you would do anything for me. You said you would die for me. But I don’t want you to die for me, I want you to live for me, I want you to be with me,’ she pleaded. He tried to muster up the courage and strength to at least reduce the tears that were flowing down her cheeks. He was at the strange intersection where the heart, mind and logic knew that she was right but where his body was in discordance with it all. She was not asking much of him. Just one more spoon of food, just one more sip of water, that was all she was asking him to swallow. His cancer ravaged body needed it desperately. The more nutritious substances his body absorbed the better the chances of prolonging his life, and the more likely it was that he would be able to perform Hajj which was a mere two months away.

‘I don’t want you to die for me, I want you to live for me, I want you to be with me.’

She had dreamt of performing Hajj for decades. So did he. Her dreams always were of them performing Hajj together. So were his. Visiting the Kabr of

the Beloved Prophet (SAW) in Madinah, together. Making Umrah and Tawaafs thereafter, together. Standing on Arafat together. All their married lives they lived for and with each other. She could not envisage performing Hajj without him. His projected life expectancy was about a year according to medical estimates. The spread of his cancer, though aggressive in nature, was slowed by medical intervention. This came with unpleasant side effects such as persistent nausea and a lack of appetite. Food, though vital for his improvement, had no appeal to him and at times even repulsed him. It was that ironic and vicious cycle where the medical treatment which is so vital to prolonging life on this earth leads to impairment in the ability to feed which in turn leads to a poor nutritional state that hampers the body’s ability to fight the disease.

must go on Hajj Doc,’ he said. We were in my rooms in Cape Town for his medical assessment just before they were to depart for the Holy journey. I

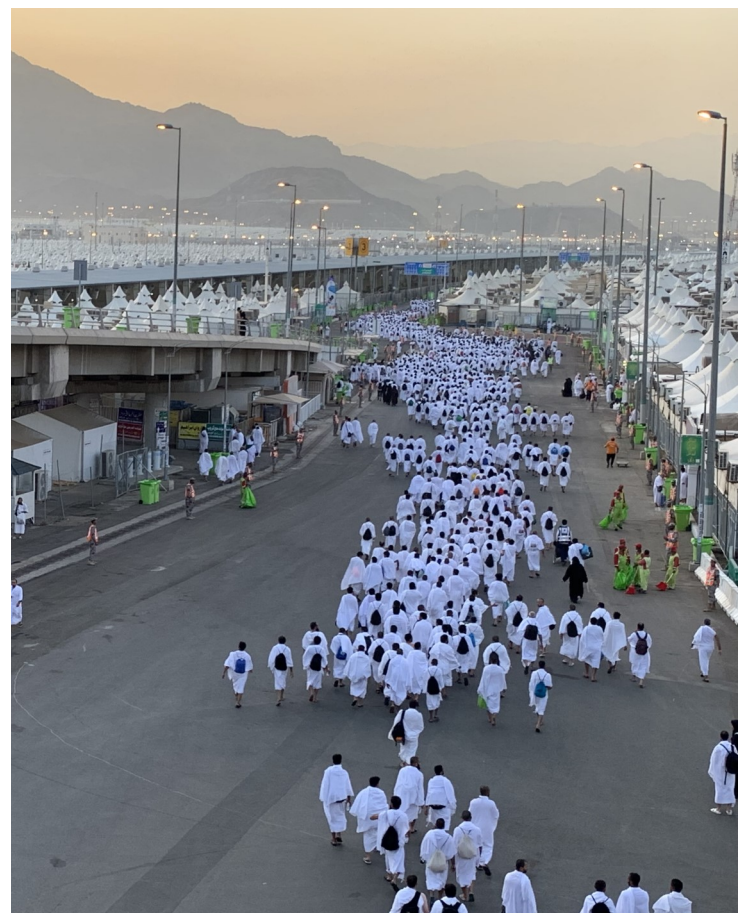
never look for reasons for travellers not to undertake this ultimate Muslim journey, in fact we look for all the reasons to ensure that Hujjaaj in his situation should be assisted to embark on this life changing journey. He had just completed his course of chemotherapy and the side effects would settle gradually. He felt miserable, nauseas, weak and exhibited clear signs of depression. ‘I know the cycle Doc,’ he said. Whilst on the medication he at times felt it was better to die from his cancer than to live with the side-effects of life-saving medication. He was of the unfortunate sufferers who experienced the worst end of the spectrum as far as side-effects were concerned. ‘I just pray for the minutes, hours, days and weeks to pass,’ he said. After a few weeks cycle, the course of the medication is stopped and then he improves dramatically. ‘Then I feel that it really is worth the trauma,’ he added.

‘I am going on Hajj,’ he said determinedly. ‘Of course I want to perform it with my wife. Never have we considered embarking on this journey other as a married couple. I am forcing myself to eat to build some muscle and fat so that I can carry her when she faints,’ he continued wickedly. He exercised within his capabilities and had worked out his treatment regime with his specialists so that he would be off the toxic medication when he was going to be away for the journey. His mind had absolute clarity of purpose, but this was not mirrored in his frail body. ‘There seems to be a disconnect in what I want to do and translating it into action Doc,’ he said. ‘But come what may, I’ll be next to my wife on Arafat. I’ll make our dream come true.’

‘Many are saying that I cling on to life for my wife, so that I can be with her during this spiritual journey. In truth she is living for me. She is doing all the preparations, making sure that all my comforts are met and that my journey is going to be easy. She somehow is sacrificing some of her comforts and disposing of her jewellery so that I may be fly business class whilst she is crammed in cattle class. She does not know that I am aware

of it. Yes, I am preparing for Hajj as we planned for all these years and will modify it extensively. We’ll not walk from Arafat to Mina like millions of others as I’ll probably be wheelchair bound and will need to use busses. But as much as this is a journey by us as a couple, it is also a journey about me. When we are on Arafat we’ll be bonded as a couple beseeching our Creator. But there are matters that are between me and my Lord. I need that one to one time,’ he said.

I listened in awe as he spoke. Very seldom have I encountered such determination and clarity of thought. He laughed softly. ‘You know Doc, I think you’ll feel the way I do if you have to listen to a patient’s heart without a stethoscope or a surgeon has to operate without scalpels and anaesthetics. You’ll have the skills but will lack the tools. I know what I want to do but feel so weak that I am worried that I would be unable to do it.’ Behind the wise and deeply philosophical concepts that he elucidated about earlier was still



The road to Hajj differs for everyone

‘But more than for my wife and for myself, I am doing this for my Creator. There must be a reason that we are all called for Hajj at least once in our lifetime. We are taught that it is an obligation and a debt that we owe Allah. The closer the time comes the more I realise that there is more to that notion. My heart truly wants to be there, my soul feels that it is there already and all I need to do is for my physical body to get there. Someone told me that those who leave this earth during Hajj are guaranteed heaven. If Allah wills it then so be it. I am at the moment living for my Hajj. But I want to live during my Hajj, I want to live my Hajj. I want it to truly sink into me, embody me and be part of me. I want my spiritual, emotional and physical components as one when we assemble in our millions in front of our Lord,’ he continued.

the fragility of a human being. ‘This is Hajj,’ I said. ‘It is recognising your weaknesses and doing your utmost to overcome it with your inner strengths. Allah is aware of it all and will intervene as He sees fit. You have time to get stronger and insha-Allah will be as healthy as possible on the day of Wuqoof,’ I added.

Hajj is our time with our Creator. I marvelled at the irony of him having time to increase his strength and medical condition in the short term for Hajj before the ravages of cancer will insidiously return soon thereafter. Time is so constant, yet so fickle and malleable. A number of people were giving of their time to ensure that his time on Arafat will surely come. He stood on Arafat saying ‘Labaaik, I am here.’ His time had come.

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