

Hajj Stories

Arafat on whose terms?

January 2020



Dr Salim Parker

She was furious and was clearly letting him know her thoughts in not the gentlest of tones. They were waiting to see me in my consulting rooms and were to be my last patients for the day. The patient that was consulting me and I even heard an object or two being displaced and then replaced in the waiting room. A muffled masculine groan of pain at on stage was also audible. We were a group of South Africans in Makkah about two weeks before Hajj and the excitement with a bit of trepidation was evident amongst all the pilgrims. The one I was consulting was anxiously fearing that some illness or calamity may strike her before the day of Arafat, the most important day in the life of a Muslim, arrived. It took some time reassuring her that Allah will smile on her. When I opened the door for her to leave the consulting room, we both noticed the couple sitting. Her hands were tugging at his clothes and whilst her face was tearful, she was uttering some profanities.

When she noticed us, she jumped up and hurried out of the waiting room. Her husband was too embarrassed to say or do anything and merely sat, star-

ing at the ground. My last patient greeted discreetly and quietly left, closing the door behind her, leaving just me and the husband. The room was eerily silent, with just the very soft



No artificial restrictions should be imposed on the journey to Arafat

humming of the air conditioner breaking the sound vacuum. I greeted him and invited him to my consulting room. He did not move or say a word. I walked up to him and again greeted, stretching out my hand in the customary Islamic manner. He did not look up. I noticed the tears welling up above his lower eyelids and without any persuasion rolling down his cheeks. I

asked him redundantly if he was okay and again there was no response. I took his hand and invited him to the consulting room. He obliged.

‘I know what I have to do,’ he sighed as he sat down. He slowly, after much gentle persuasion, started to relate his story. He was previously married to his childhood friend and they were blessed with two beautiful children. Then he met the lady who now is his current wife. She was fully aware of his marital status and she was quite prepared to be his second wife. His first wife was immensely saddened, tormented by what she perceived to have been her failure as a spouse. No woman would ever truly accept her husband’s decision to remarry. She however could not deny her husband the request as he always provided well for her and their children. After much consultations with her family and the Imam involved, a seemingly amicable arrangement was reached where the husband would share slightly more time with his first wife as he would spend time with his children there. He would continue with his routine chores of taking them to school and spending Saturdays encouraging

them at the sport codes that they excelled in. The second wife agreed wholeheartedly.

That arrangements lasted less than a month. The second wife reneged on her acceptance of the arrangements. She became increasingly jealous of the first wife, at times irrationally accusing her husband of spending time with the first wife even though she was calling him at

his place of employment. Time with his children was increasingly cut short by her sudden demands for freshly occurring emergencies at her house to be immediately attended to. His first spouse could not bear the constant harassment and accusations and, after futile interventions by the Imam, divorced him. This however merely aggravated the situation. Now he was accused of having an affair with his ex-wife with the children being the conduit for passing messages. ‘Doc, the irony was that my first wife accepted

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the situation of me re-marrying but my second wife, who in effect knew that I was not prepared to divorce my first wife, could not accept the situation,’ he said.

He then decided to bring his second wife for Hajj. Initially her attention was solely focussed on it. He however had to deal with issues close to his heart. ‘My children were very excited about me performing Hajj. They were both busy memorising the Holy Quran and

were very engrained in their religion. Hajj was the very pinnacle of their perception of their Deen. However his second wife saw their interest and presence as an intrusion and a number of unsavoury incidents occurred before they departed for the Holy Land. He managed a few stolen moments with his children. Their mother was not allowed to come and greet. ‘It broke my heart that so many

men and women came to greet me but the mother of my children could not,’ he lamented. In Madinah, the City of Peace which they initially visited, she watched him like a hawk. He could not like other parents relate the amazing tranquillity and spirituality of the Prophet’s City to his children as she always kept his mobile phone. He reluctantly allowed it. In his mind it was to keep the peace, it was to

not their Hajj be negatively affected.

He kept in touch with them by using a very good friend’s phone when the occasion arose. However this very day his youngest child became sick and was hospitalised. That’s when he decided that he is not going to communicate secretly with them and he openly used his phone whilst sitting in the waiting room. ‘Doc, they are my children and my first wife is still a good person. I intend to make duaa for all of them and I am quite open about it now. Allah

knows that this is my Hajj as well,’ he said. ‘I am going to give my wife a choice. Either she accepts that my children are part of me or I’ll divorce her here in Makkah just before Hajj. The reality is that we can leave our spouses but our children will always be ours. I cannot go to Arafat with shackles around my neck choking me,’ he added. We chatted a while and then I attended to his medical condition. He agreed to one of the Imams to talk to the them as couple that very evening.

I saw him at the breakfast the next morning. He sat alone and I joined him. He thanked me for arranging the session with the Imam. He did not give any details of the meeting, only saying that he was now ready for Hajj. I did not ask him whether his thoughts about divorce were discussed nor what his wife’s reactions were like in the meeting. His child was to be discharged from hospital. He was going to Arafat with his parents, his children, his siblings and all those who previously were or still were part of his life in his prayers and his thoughts.

I never met his wife neither did I see him again. There are of course two sides to each story. There is however only one natural father to each child. There is only one Arafat and for the vast majority of Muslims it will be a once in a lifetime event. Never should there be human imposed restrictions.

salimparker@yahoo.com