

Hajj Stories

We are all Alive

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He read the card over and over again. Of course he understood exactly what was written on it the very first time. It was not so much the message or the card itself that made him cling to it. It was more the emotional attachment that repeatedly led to a surge of lost awareness, of what was before will never be again. There is that moment between feeling blessed and happy to have had, and the despair that acute and sudden severance brings about. This is not how he really planned for Hajj. The cards were always going to be part of his journey. It would serve as a reminder of what he needed to do on a daily basis, a reminder of the everyday mundane matters that we as uninitiated children often do not think about. He read it once more, the words of his mother who was no more.

His mother was not going to accompany him and his father on Hajj. She had been blessed to go on the journey more than a decade ago with her parents who fully funded her trip. This was at a time when her husband could not afford to send, and much less accompany her. She was initially reluctant to go without her spouse but he ra-

tionally explained that he could not guarantee that they would ever be able to afford it. 'I'll never forgive myself if you don't go now and leave this earth without ever performing Hajj,' he told her. She never regretted their decision and felt privileged and honoured to stand on Arafat with those who raised her. She never worked during her marriage but upon her return started a small home industry. It was not a money spinner but she could put away money for future travels.

More than a decade later her husband's health started to deteriorate. She had saved enough money for the two of them to perform Hajj but, as she was on Hajj before, her chances of accompanying her husband were slim and she asked her son, who also had not performed his Hajj yet, to accompany his father. They still applied to get her ac-

credited as well but they were mindful that there were thousands on the list who would be first time travelers. The year the two males were accredited, the father was wheelchair bound and she decided not to postpone until a future year when she might be able to join them. She was a meticulous planner and in relatively good health. All the preparatory work was done by her. She sorted out their agent, flights and hotel details. And of course she prepared the cards. All of her husband's details were on the cards.

'No one knows your father like I do,' she told her son. I made these cards for you with all his likes dislikes, medications, routines and habits. Your dad gets up an hour before Fajr, when you are still merrily snoring away. You two will be sharing a room on the journey and you need to be aware of this.' She went to great lengths to ensure that no stone was left unturned. She even worked out what clothes he should wear on which day whilst they were in Saudi Arabia. All the information was on the cards. Unlike a normal deck, they were arranged in a meticulously, not to be shuffled order. 'I will not be there with the two of you,' she said. Her words turned out to be significant as, with everything in place three weeks prior to their departure for Hajj, she departed from this temporary abode.

appreciated her but now he would not be able to. 'I should have done it when I thought about it and not procrastinate until it was too late, he lamented. He thought of the days when his mother would wait patiently to come home and would keep his supper warm, only for him to tell her that he forgot to let her know that he went to eat out with his friends. 'Don't let guilt overcome you,' he was advised. Was he not going to the place

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on earth to plead for atonement and ask for his mother to be blessed with the highest place in Heaven? The turmoil of the soul and heart can sometimes not be pacified by the serenity of logic and reason.

They arrived in Madinah and he felt his loss more intensely. The plan was to video call his mother on a daily basis and she would in effect live, walk and experience their journey with her. He dutifully performed his daily chores and took great care to follow the instructions on the cards. His father's health was stable and he could manage most of this daily routines himself. He just could not walk more than a few metres and was dependent on assistance when he was in his wheelchair. 'I miss

Heaven. 'I miss her too and I am here,' his father said matter of factually without a hint of any emotion.

The words jolted him. He realised he never took his father into account except as a burden. His mother was the ever-present, warm and embracing parent in his life. He thought back to his mother's words just after he had an argument with his father. 'I am here in your life virtually all the time. Your father seems ab-

sent most of the time but he is providing, working and earning modestly. He may not have attended school meetings or your sport events as he was working but he always enquired about your progress. He went to great lengths to provide you with whatever you needed.' Now his mother was not there but his father was.

They were still in Rhodul Jannah, a part of Heaven. He always prayed for his mother to be elevated to the highest level in Jannah. Tears welled up in his eyes. 'Mom is here with us Dad,' he said. We are all three together now. Something changed that day. He saw his father not as an extension of his family but an integral part of it. He previously used to interact with and serve his paternal parent routinely. Now he was talking, laughing and learning with a person who was his father and evolving to be more than that. He was now a confidante, a person who willingly listened and astutely advised. He learnt more about him, and bonded much more in the remaining few weeks than they did for the previous decades.

On Arafat they stood at the time of Wuqoof. The one so precious to them was not standing between them, her memories were echoing with each of their heartbeats. She may not have united her husband and son whilst she was gracing their every day lives, but she was now united with them during the most important time of their lives.

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We stand together

He did not have the usual support that his life was so dependent on. He had all the plans to show his mother how much he

Mom and wish so much that she was here,' he told his father as they sat in the Rhodul Jannah, the part of the Mosque in Madinah that is considered part of