

Hajj Stories

Best Time to be Home

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Dr Salim Parker

‘I am coming home.’ he told me over the phone. He was in Makkah accompanying a group of mostly first time travelers whilst I was still in Cape Town. He had performed his obligatory Hajj three years earlier and since then has been one of many who simply could not resist the opportunity to assist pilgrims embarking on the most important journey of their lives. He was already in Saudi Arabia for two weeks, first in the City of Peace where our beloved Prophet (SAW) is buried and now in the City where he was born. It was a time and place where numerous Umrahs and Tawaafs could be performed. It was a time for reflection and being thankful for the opportunities that our Creator bestowed on us. Everyone in Makkah was brimming with excitement. Every day tens of thousands were streaming into the Holy City knowing that it would in all likelihood be their only journey ever to the centre of the Islamic Universe. Yet, he said he wants to come home to South Africa.

I was still in Cape Town but my soul had already taken flight. Hajj was just about two weeks away and I was sorting out all my travel arrangements. I was

privileged, in fact honoured, to have been able to be on the annual gathering of Muslims on the plains of Arafat for more than a month for the preceding fifteen years but work commitments has shortened that visit to not more than two weeks during

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the last three years. I was of course not complaining. Not at all! Just to be with the millions succumbing and reaching out to their Creator on Arafat is unparalleled. Many have tried through written word, verse, harmonious renditions and more recently using livestreaming to convey the emotions and spirituality of the pilgrims all serenely part of a calm ocean on Arafat before they ebb their way at sunset to Musdalifah. There is only one way to fully comprehend and appreciate the crest of the pilgrim’s wave and that is to personally be part of the current. I was really looking forward to joining him in Makkah. Yet he wanted to come home.

‘My wife is not well at all back home,’ he said redundantly. I was well aware of her medical

condition. The insidious discoloration of her eyes was first noted by their daughter. The tinge of yellow where there is normally sparkling white is seen in many medical conditions. She had no pain, and no symptoms of note except for a few days of not being her normal self. Some blood tests followed, and then some radiological tests. This happened whilst he was in Saudi Arabia. He was kept informed of developments all the time. As doctors we always fear these type of pain free conditions. Some ailments herald their arrival with an orchestra like effect, such as the clusters of skin eruptions seen in certain viral ailments. Some others though are only detected when it is too late to do much about it. We were worried that she had one of those conditions.

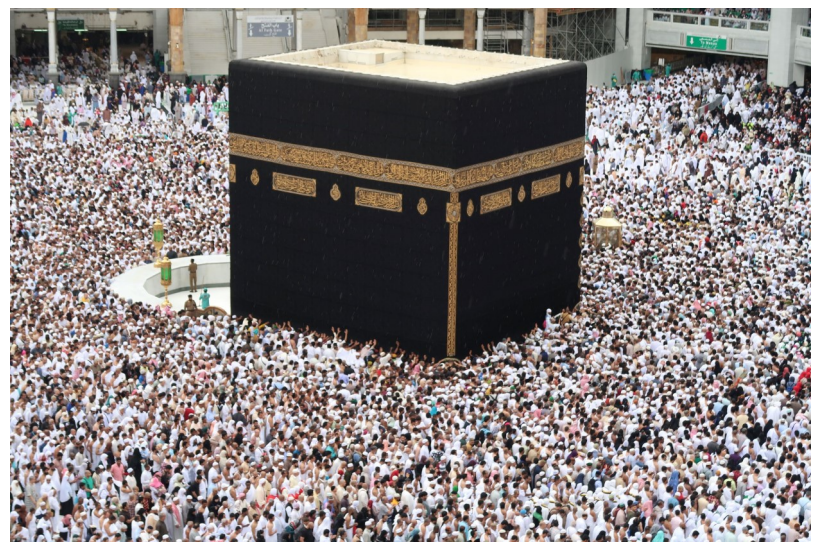
‘What are you able to do in the next two weeks?’ I probed gently. Certain procedures take a bit of time. Before the doctors in Cape Town could do further tests on his wife, they had to give the discoloration time to resolve. This would have taken at least two weeks. He had to decide whether to come home and support his spouse of more than thirty years or stay and assist the Hujjaaj and then perform Hajj. The type

of visa he had was also one where his passport was taken away and only returned after Hajj. Of course the South African embassy can always intervene and expedite requests for a departure before the pilgrimage commenced. Though time consuming and requiring adherence to protocol and navigating numerous red tapes, it was possible. His wife had an excellent support structure, with a number of medical professionals in the immediate family, as well as loving adult children.

‘I know her better than anyone on this planet,’ he told me. ‘I need to be home to support, encourage and just be with her when she goes for all these tests. ‘What does your wife want you to do?’ I asked. He was silent

for a while. ‘She feels that I should finish Hajj and then come home,’ he at last responded. ‘What would be different if you are here now except for your obviously reassuring and comforting physical presence?’ I asked. I knew they were in virtually daily video contact and he probably knew more of what was happening than anyone who was at home with her. ‘It’s being so far away that is so unnerving,’ he replied. He was a very hands-on person, always ready to do things immediately

‘I would rather have you on Hajj and making Duaa for my health in Makkah and during the days of Hajj. Perform a Tawaaf for my health and recovery and keep me and everyone else in your Duaas when you are on Arafat. There is no better place and time for all prayers to be answered,’ she added. He could not counter her rationale. Deep down we knew that he was aware that it was the correct guidance. I vividly recalled the two of them standing under a tree on Arafat in deep prayer a



Someone somewhere is making Duaa for you

and not relying on others. I knew him quite well and indicated to him that I would chat with his wife and, as a doctor, get a sense if there was any urgency for him to speedily return.

We went to visit her the next day. She was as talkative and humorous as normal. She described no medical issues and in fact the eye discoloration was the only indication of any underlying condition. She was aware that her husband wanted to return home immediately and when I raised the issue she had a more serious tone. We discussed it for a few minutes but I realised a video call to him would most likely be more impactful. The specialist who had to do specific procedure advised that it should be done only in two weeks’ time as the cause of her symptoms need to settle first. ‘I have to wait for two weeks anyway before anything can be done,’ she told him over the video call. Her smiling face beamed as his picture appeared on the screen. It was amazing how technology could connect people in real time. There was truly not an inch separating them at that moment.

few years earlier when they performed their obligatory Hajj. This time, though he would be standing alone during the time of Wuqoof, he would feel her heartbeat with each pulse.

A few weeks later I joined him on Arafat. Though our group was split in separate camps, we all made a Duaa for her wellbeing and the wellbeing of all others who could not be with us. When on Arafat, everything is possible. I firmly believe that all the prayers collectively bought her more time to grace this world a bit longer than would be expected what was later confirmed to be an inevitably fatal disease. The power of prayer is undeniable.

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