

Hajj Stories

Hajj at what cost

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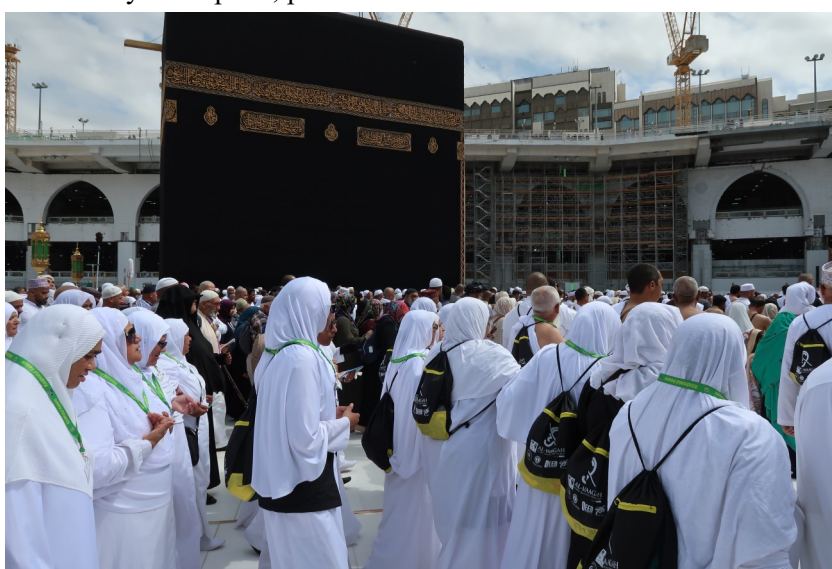


Dr Salim Parker

‘I cannot perform Hajj this year,’ he said. ‘Please postpone my journey till next year,’ he added. He looked down, dejected and close to tears. His shoulders slouched. He not only was evidently close to tears but was also clearly resigned to his fate. There was no fight in him, no fire to light the path on the most important journey in the life of a Muslim. There was still about three months left before his planned departure from the southwestern tip of Africa to the Holy Land. Three months to sort out any issues, overcome any obstacles and embrace the journey without any worries. The agents and the Hajj regulatory bodies had indicated that all Hajj monies had to be paid in full within two days. Most pilgrims had paid their dues as soon as they heard that they were accredited. Of course there were some who genuinely struggled to get the last few cents together, just as there are always a few who’ll cling onto their worldly fortunes simply because they just cannot part with it.

His agent was very sympathetic and asked whether he could assist in any way. The reply was in the negative no matter what ap-

proach was taken. The agent explained that the Hajj authority will have to be contacted and the accreditation held over till the next year. A few telephone calls were made and some suggestions were discussed. ‘We’ll refund your deposit; please con-



Who knows what story each pilgrim can tell

sider us for your travels next year’ the agent said. ‘No! No! Please keep the deposit! I cannot have the money in my possession!’ he very emotionally responded. The agent was taken aback. ‘The Hajj regulations indicates that all monies received for this year’s Hajj has to be refunded if the journey is cancelled,’ the agent said. ‘I am not cancelling my Hajj, I am postponing it. Besides, if I re-

ceive the deposit, it will be gone within the next day or two,’ he replied.

The agent, a good friend of mine, listened attentively. There was clearly something amiss. The prospective pilgrim was one of the first to sign up, was the first to put down the full deposit and in fact would have paid the full amount due if there was not a waiting period for the money to be released from the bank. He attended every Hajj class and every meeting. In fact, he attended meetings that were duplicated as some in the group could not attend the scheduled ones. He insisted on receiving his compulsory vaccinations even though the final list was not announced yet. He not only was initially financially prepared, he was definitely spiritually and emotionally prepared. Now something serious had to have happened. We knew that his wife had passed away more than a decade ago and he had two married children and a few grandchildren.

The agent was not merely a travel consultant, he was also very a very perceptive human being. He knew many people and had an endless string of contacts. ‘I know that your heart, soul, mind and actions indicates that you

and abused drugs. He was in a rehabilitation centre and was drug free soon thereafter. Marriage and two beautiful children followed but he recently was retrenched and became severely depressed. Despite a very supportive family and set of friends, he got trapped in his bad old vice.

‘I knew your mom well, and her greatest desire was to perform Hajj. Allah deemed otherwise...’

‘I need to pay for his rehabilitation,’ he said. The agent knew the deceased wife and has met the son on previous occasions but was not aware of his problems. The son accompanied his father when he initially booked and did most of the negotiations about the package. He created a really favourable impression on those whom he interacted with. We have all dealt with addicts before. There are some who do not deep down want to acknowledge that they have a problem. ‘I can stop any time,’ they say but never do. They do not want to be assisted and their presence in rehabilitation centres is induced and enforced more by family and friends than by a cry to be helped. They move from one place to another, with those close to them feeling that they are at least doing something. The addict in these cases does not want to be helped nor wants to help themselves.

The case of the son in this case was different. He was drug free for years and relapsed due to external identifiable causes. Of course being unemployed does not justify fleeing to drugs but the agent was of the view that much could be done. Money could be saved by avoiding the prohibitive cost of rehabilitation, and the journey of a lifetime could still be undertaken. The agent’s heart really went out to the father. ‘I’ll wait a few days and then I’ll cancel the contract if you still want me to do so,’ he told the elderly man, who agreed and left the building. The agent phoned the son and asked him to meet him to iron out some minor parts of the contract. It was evident that the son was blissfully unaware of the trip being cancelled. An appointment was set up for the next day.

After some initial chitchats, the agent got quite serious. ‘I knew your mom well, and her greatest desire was to perform Hajj. Allah deemed otherwise and she departed before her deepest desire to stand on the plains of Arafat with your father could be fulfilled. Your dad was saving money to perform Hajj this year

and insha-Allah in the near future perform her Badl Hajj,’ he said. He son looked sad and tears started crawling down his cheeks. They continued their conversation and it became clear to the agent that the son was not aware that the father had postponed his trip. He duly informed him. ‘I am a weak person and sought refuge in drugs,’ he confessed. ‘But I cannot let my father not stand in Ihram at the time of Wuqoof on Arafat,’ he added determinedly.

It appeared that an immediate antidote was administered to him. He called a meeting with his family and pledged to immediately stop his drug abuse. With the input of his previous counsellors measures were put in place to support him without having to be admitted for into the costly rehabilitation program. His father had to carry some of his normal living costs whilst the son was unemployed but the agent knew a kind benefactor who made up the shortfall for the Hajj journey. A few days later an offer of employment came to the son.

‘Dad, this is not only your Hajj, this is mom’s Hajj, this is my Hajj, this is our Hajj.’ He said. He attended every meeting and Hajj class with his father until the day of departure. He was there when his father bade salaam to his family at the airport, he telephoned him on a daily basis and he was in the heart and Duaas when we donned our Ihrams on the first day. I saw his dad with arms outstretched stretching for the highest reaches on Arafat. To me it appeared that his son was gently supporting those hands so that they will never tire.

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