

Hajj Stories

Hajj Not to Be

December 2021



Dr Salim Parker

‘Doc, you again going on Hajj without me,’ she jokingly but sadly said. For twenty consecutive years she came for her medical checkup prior to my departure to the Holy Land and this visit also doubled as a time for her to greet me and her requests that I should keep her in my Du-aas. ‘Remember your promise,’ she earnestly continued. ‘How can I forget if you remind me of it every time I see you!’ I jested. ‘But in all seriousness, we must plan now. I know that I said that I’ll accompany you on your obligatory Hajj and I promised that on that journey I’ll ensure that you will reach Arafat even if I have to push you in a wheelchair or carry you if you for some reason fell ill on the journey,’ I added. I try to always fulfil my promises. There are times that circumstances dictate otherwise. This was one of those unfortunate ones.

She first attended our practice when we had just opened more than thirty years ago. I was fresh out of university and our first few encounters were a bit combative. She was asthmatic and a smoker and we had endless confrontations about the deleterious effects of nicotine on her already compromised lungs. She had a physically demanding job and

boasted that her medical condition and addiction never affected her ability to perform her duties. After a few years she agreed to consider decreasing her daily toxic inhalations. We used to talk about health, healing, work stressors and of course all worldly things such as politics and the price of cigarettes. We never spoke about religion even though we were both Muslims, except once when I tried to use it as a tool to emphasis to her that it could be considered a prohibited substance. This she brushed aside. This all changed when I told her that I was going to perform my obligatory Hajj.

‘I never considered going to Saudi Arabia. It is too expensive! How much will it cost to perform Hajj?’ she said. I thought that this was the ideal opportunity to do a bit of medical economics and calculated the money that she literally burnt by smoking for two decades. ‘You could have gone for Hajj already and had some change if you had to save the money that you spent buying cigarettes,’ I explained. My calculations only looked at the physical rands and cents and did not even look at the medical expenses incurred due to the side effects of smoking. I told her of a patient who stopped smoking a

few years earlier and diligently put the money that would have been spent on tobacco into a savings account. With that money he bought a car, not a new one

financially when family knocked on her door for help, thwarting her plans to perform Hajj within ten years. ‘Just when I start saving, someone is either going to

times when she could not remember the names of her immediate family members. She frequently forgot my name and that of the carer who accompanied

“Allah is aware of the good you are doing”

but a set of wheels nevertheless. ‘I cannot think of a better reason to stop smoking and saving the money for your Hajj,’ I suggested.

She was immediately inspired to aspire towards the fifth pillar of Islam. It took a while for her to stop smoking. In fact, she tried for about six years before she

lose their house if I do not help out or someone will not be able to continue their education,’ she once lamented. ‘Allah is aware of the good you are doing,’ I tried consoling her.

It was not only her wealth that was continuously affected. Her health also started to deteriorate. First it was her lungs, then she

her. She however never left my rooms without reminding me of my promise to her. It was the one constant in her life that nothing could take away from her. During one visit she mentioned to me that my name, which she could not remember, was not important to her. All that mattered was that I was to be with her on her Fard Hajj.



Some will never physically don their Ihram

finally was freed of her addiction. There were multiple family incidents which aggravated her anxiety and slight depression leading her to seek refuge in her cigarettes during those years, but she persevered and finally succeeded. Life was however not kind to her. She had to help out

developed high blood pressure and diabetes. This led to more frequent visits to our practice and over the years the subtle and initially hard to detect mental changes became more pronounced. Her Alzheimer’s Disease led to her in effect losing her independence. There were

salimparker@yahoo.com