

Hajj Stories

Less is Equal

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He paid a fortune for his Hajj package. He could of course afford it; word had it that he was a billionaire and would not spare any expense for his and his family's comfort. Some feel that worldly realities such as soaring high temperatures and extremely uncomfortable humidity should be countered as much as possible as it distracts from the spiritual appreciation of Hajj. Maybe there is truth in it as it was indeed difficult to concentrate on connecting with your Creator whilst drenched in sweat, feeling and appearing lost as well as suffering from unquenchable thirst. Others point out that there is nothing more pleasing to our Lord than His subjects streaming away from Arafat in a completely disheveled state after having stood arms outstretched at the time of Wuqoof pleading for their sins to be forgiven. He paid for what he considered the best for his family and was supposed to have private air-conditioned transport and accommodation throughout his journey. Allah willed otherwise.

His arrival in Makkah itself was uneventful. The travel agent enabled his smooth checking in at the world class hotel and after he and his family refreshed themselves, arranged for a spiritual leader to escort them on their Umrah. They did not have the

security ring of soldiers that ensures that royals can unhindered record their circumambulation of the Kaba'a on their cellphones. However it was timed for when the Haram was least crowded. Whenever he wanted to perform a tawaf, the agent arranged for him to be accompanied by personnel. Visiting the historical sites in and around Makkah was also arranged with an invaluable guide who transported them in a luxurious vehicle replete with all types of refreshments. The rest of the group were crammed into a bus with poorly functioning air conditioning and a guide shouting through a loudhailer from the front, his words deflected by the number of passengers standing in the aisle due to a lack of seats.

His family stayed in their hotel on the Mataaf until the day before Hajj. The rest of us moved about a week beforehand to Azizyah as the costs of the Makkah hotels were simply exorbitant. He and his family were to be moved to a luxurious apartment in Azizyah on that day as moving from Makkah to join the rest of the group on the first day of Hajj would have been impossible due to crowds, traffic and other logistics such as road closures. This in itself was difficult to achieve as their vehicle was diverted frequently and a ten minute journey landed up taking

more than three hours. He understood that many matters were completely in the hands of the Saudi authorities and that the agent had no control over it. The agent in turn relied on information and structures provided by their suppliers. During Hajj anything can change.

“You are all here now. You have all arrived.”

The first day of Hajj was accompanied by excitement, anticipation and of course trepidation as the vast majority of pilgrims would be honoured just once in their lives for this unbelievable privilege. A significant number of us embarked to walk the short distance from Azizyah to Mina in about thirty minutes, whilst most others boarded buses which journeyed them to their tents within an hour or two. He had to wait a few hours for his paid for private luxury vehicle to arrive. Though all the necessary paperwork and arrangements were in place, the vehicle involved was stopped at every checkpoint, commanded to take an alternate route which led to another dead end on numerous occasions, and led to a journey lasting a few hours. The agent was highly apologetic though everyone

the exuberance of proclaiming ‘Laibaik!’ We were indeed present and were soon to present ourselves to receive the greatest present in the life of any Muslim. Families were busy organizing who was going to carry what, couples were deciding where to leave some of their belongings as

and his family should have an empty seat next to them on which they could place their backpacks. This required some of the younger males to have to stand in the aisle. ‘No, you cannot stand like that. Please put our bags in the aisle and let my fellow pilgrims be seated,’ he insisted. Because he was always resident in hotels way out of reach of his fellow group travellers, he did not get to know any of them. Now he was chatting to some of them, exchanging Duas, realizing that all were as fragile in their vulnerability, and as yearning to be forgiven by Allah. irrespective of their background. No one asked him about his riches and frankly no one cared.

The agent arranged a special tent for his family on Arafat. They put their bags in there and immediately joined the other pilgrims in the normal large congregational tent. Staff members offered to fetch breakfast for him but he preferred to walk to the buffet tent with the Imam and other brothers. He was truly in the spirit of being a drop in the sea of pilgrims all preparing to be embraced by a tsunami of blessings of forgiveness. He told the Imam that his staff did all his bookings as usual, and never took the special considerations

difficult to transport everything to Arafat, and the agents were grouping the pilgrims to ease transport. He was informed that all his private transportation arrangements were in place but that nothing was guaranteed.

‘We’ll travel with the group,’ he informed the agent. There was no easy way to distinguish him from the rest of the pilgrims. All appeared the same, all were to be judged the same by our Creator. The agent frantically was trying to get some confirmation from his contacts about the already paid arrangements but the Imam in the group, who by now had established a good relationship with his family, was pleased. ‘If we travel as a group, we can be there for each other. We can help your family if needed and you can help anyone that you are capable of,’ the Imam said. He



Our paths may differ, but on Arafat we all equal.

knew it was not his fault. A private tent was arranged on Mina.

Early the next morning everyone was getting ready for the most important day of their lives. Arafat was about twelve kilometers and about two hours by bus away. All unified by our simple Ihrams, we were millions of individual hearts beating as one Umamah, exhaling our passion with

never was a demanding or arrogant person and his concept of the physical journey was that certain luxuries could be paid for. He knew that the spiritual blessings could only come from his Creator.

The agent tried to compensate in whatever way he could. On the bus trip from Mina to Arafat the agent insisted that our pilgrim

for this trip into account. ‘I am glad all the special arrangements went awry,’ he said. ‘Now I am one with all my brothers and sisters,’ he added.

‘You are all here now. You have all arrived,’ the Imam smiled. ‘Laibaik!’ We are all here. As one. As equals.

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