

Hajj Stories

Serving the Guests of Allah

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‘Can you sort out my cell phone charger?’ she asked. We were on Mina on the first day of Hajj. I was dressed in civilian clothing busy sorting out an air conditioner in a tent. It was a blazingly hot day and the largest temporary city in the world was largely untouched for nearly a year since the previous Hajj. There was a flurry of activity for the previous two weeks but there was never going to be enough time for each and every tent to be fully checked and ensuring that all equipment was in full working order. It was really to be expected again as we experienced it every year. The heat just made the effects of the lack of working cooling equipment much more acute. All the pilgrims in that tent took a refreshing bath early in the morning, put on their crisp clean Ihrams thereafter and travelled in air-conditioned buses from Makkah to Mina. Now, barely a few hours later, they were drenched in sweat.

‘Give me a few minutes. I am nearly done,’ I replied. She dutifully did that and after about fifteen minutes I had the air-conditioner and her charger working. This involved a mere snug fit of the plug into the relevant socket. She thanked me profusely and then then asked me

whether we technicians were permitted to perform Hajj. She joined our group on that particular day and we had not met before. I also arrived in Saudi a few days earlier and did not have time to familiarize myself with all the Hujjaaj travelling with our group. She clearly was not aware that I was the group’s doctor. It definitely did not bother me. Those of us that were blessed annually to serve the Hujjaaj would do it in any capacity. We all were taught that the first day of Hajj was the day of Quenching the Thirst, Yawm at-Tarwiyah. It gave me immense satisfaction that I could assist our Hujjaaj in cooling down and carry water to them.

I explained to her that us workers may perform Hajj as our visas permit it. ‘So why are you not wearing your Ihram?’ she asked. ‘We try to get all Hujjaaj comfortable and settled before we put on our Ihrams. Sometimes it is with everyone else in Makkah, sometimes it is late on the first day on Mina, and I even on occasion only managed to put it on after reaching Arafat,’ I replied. I added that it was easier to do perform certain tasks like climbing onto the roof of a tent to fix a leaking pipe. This fascinated her and we had a discussion about

how it affects our ability to pray and devote ourselves to the worshipping of our Creator. ‘We are rewarded for our prayers and we are rewarded for our deeds. Ultimately Allah will look at our intentions and our deeds and will reward us accordingly. If you keep us in you Duaas, Allah would recognize our humble attempts,’ I replied.

anyone is the ultimate aim for us when we perform the ultimate journey.

It was quite an eventful day. A number of pilgrims presented with medical problems and I donned my stethoscope and attended to them. It was close to midnight when there was a brief respite and I had a shower and donned my Ihram. It was accom-

panied by a sense of immense relief. I was finally part of the anonymous Hujjaaj all unified in attire and intention. To be part of the masses all seeking to be as close as humanly possible to Creator fills the soul with unimaginable excitement, anxiety and trepidation. It does not matter whether one has been on Hajj

due to arrive soon and we started readying them for the journey. A flurry of final preparations took place. Some ensured that their prayer books and only absolute necessities were in their backpacks, others seemed to be going on a multiple day camp. A number were using wheelchairs and we as workers ensured that an able-bodied person was to be available to assist such pilgrims.

“We always get enough rest in order to be at our peak to serve the Guests of Allah”

She smiled. ‘Do you people ever get some rest?’ she asked. ‘Of course there is time to rest,’ I replied. I did not add that for the first three days of Hajj that may be a few hours only. There were years that we did not sleep for nearly forty-eight hours. I recall one year when I had three hours of sleep on Mina and none until

She was one of them and I happened to be assigned to her bus. It so happened that the person seated in front of her had a medical emergency and she witnessed me practicing my usual profession. A while later, as I walked up and down the bus aisle checking on all the Hujjaaj, she stopped me.



Who serves? Who is served? Everyone is equal on Arafat.

after finishing my obligatory Tawaaf and Sa’ae two days later on, the morning of Eid, in a state of spiritual ecstasy and physical collapse just before the onset of the morning prayers. I was sitting on my musalla awaiting the onset of the Fajr waqt that morning after shaving my hair and taking a bath. It was only a few minutes before the Athan was to sound. A few minutes that felt like hours. I never heard the call to prayer. A fellow pilgrim found me sound asleep on my prayer mat just after the Thuhr Athan called the faithful to prayer. ‘We always get enough rest in order to be at our peak to serve the Guests of Allah,’ I smiled. On Hajj rest is relative. Assisting

once, twice or twenty times. Everyone is as vulnerable and fallible to the mere nature of being human. Yet we all knew that we have to believe that Allah will forgive our sins and accept our prayers when we crowd the plains of Arafat the next day. The Imams and group leaders encouraged all the pilgrims to sleep. How can you sleep?! The most important day in the life of a Muslim was a breath, a hair breadth and a small bridge away. Sleep does not come easy. I don’t think I slept for more than two hours.

At three in the morning, we woke up the few pilgrims who managed to sleep. The buses transporting them to Arafat were

‘So you are the doctor of our group,’ she said. ‘I am sorry that I thought you were a technician and worker,’ she added. I smiled. ‘I am here to help in any way possible. If it means pushing a wheelchair, I’ll be happy to oblige; if I need to suture a wound then I shall do it. Right now, I want to let all the Hujjaaj to let their Creator know that we are on our way to Arafat,’ I replied. I took the microphone and started reciting the Talbya, the affirmation that we were all here. ‘Labaik!’ the whole bus echoed. We were all on Arafat. No doctors, no workers, no titles. Only mere mortals searching for salvation.

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