

Hajj Stories

Never Let go of Her Hand

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‘Always hold onto your mother’s hand. Never let it go. Remember our neighbour who passed away a few years ago? There were so many family members and friends present at his Janaza. Yet no one was aware that he was struggling to breathe during his last few hours on this earth as he lived alone. It was only by chance that I knocked on his door to ask if he wanted a lift to mosque and heard the strange gasping sounds.’ Her father had tears in his eyes as he spoke. She and her mother were to depart within a few days for Hajj. He could not accompany them as he recently suffered from an incapacitating stroke which left him wheelchair bound. Though he was physically improving steadily, his wife’s health and mental status was at best brittle. They had meticulously planned and saved to perform Hajj for more than a decade. It was felt that it was the best time for her.

There were no ways that he could travel and he also had performed his obligatory blessed Hajj already many years ago. His wife was frail but could take care of herself as far as the daily necessities of life were concerned. She just easily got baffled and bewildered in foreign surroundings and when amongst large

numbers of people. The daughter was also aware of her mother’s tendency to be distracted easily, be lost in her thoughts and be oblivious of her surroundings. Both ladies went for Hajj classes for years and were not merely mother and daughter but also companions. The unfortunate medical calamity that her husband suffered from led to her daughter being a constant support and source of comfort. The two ladies were very prepared for the journey ahead and were planning their activities during Hajj months beforehand already.

They travelled with a relatively large group and when they arrived in Madinah there were few pilgrims there. South Africans are of the first arrivals during Hajj. Getting used to certain landmarks was quite easy and every day the daughter would indicate to her mother that if they got separated, they would meet at one of the easy to find places that they identified on any given day. They made friends easily and soon found themselves going to the Haram as members of at least ten in a group. There was comfort and security in numbers and the City of Peace was truly a deeply spiritual experience. The number of pilgrims was increasing by the tens of thousands dur-

ing the first few days and then by the hundreds of thousands by the time they were set to depart for Makkah. The daughter was getting increasingly worried about the crowds.

After arriving in Makkah, they performed their Umrah relatively late at night when it was crowded but not excessively so. Some

‘We are all here together, many will be holding your mother’s hand,’ I tried reassuring her.

The day of Arafat arrived. The most important day in the life of a Muslim. Our group set off from Mina early in the morning and I found myself on the same bus as them. There were tens of thousands of buses all carrying uni-

cials accompany them to the camp. It was evident that nothing was going to appease the daughter until she held her mother’s hand again, so I immediately escorted her to our camp. ‘My mother is not here!’ she screamed as she exited the ladies camp. I called her mother’s mobile number. It rang but it was

“ ‘My mother is not here!’ she screamed. ”

the group noticed that the daughter would always hold her mother’s hand whenever they left their room. At times the mother seemed irritable but soon resigned herself to her daughter’s insistence. The group performed a Tawaaf every night and the two would always be part of this wonderful opportunity that is unique to the Kaba’a. She held her mother’s hand, she never let her go. This was unless someone else held it or the two of them were surrounded by other members of their group. They consulted me on occasions to optimise the mother’s medical condition and we discussed the possibilities of people getting lost amongst the millions on Arafat. I recounted how I had my four-year-old son tied to a leash one year when children were still permitted on Hajj and still managed to lose him much to my wife’s consternation.

We devised plans to ensure that it would not happen to the mother. We had her mobile phone programmed with a one touch emergency number and made sure she always had a fully charged spare phone battery in her bag, marked her handbag and backpack with similar information and ensured she was wearing wristbands and lanyards always marked with all identifying information. I tried to reassure them that it was highly unlikely that something could go wrong. They however heard of a gentleman, who the year before, got separated from the rest of his group just after the day of Arafat and died a martyr still shrouded in his Ihram. I tried to explain the unique unfortunate circumstances of that incident but understood the daughter’s fears.

formly Ihram clad pilgrims cramming to the same destination. The journey was slow but certain and after about two hours we reached our disembarking point. Our camp was about two hundred meters away, but we stopped on a very busy road with hundreds of poorly marked buses causing major obstructions and thousands of walking pilgrims occupying every inch of the

not answered. The daughter was now crying inconsolably.

Suddenly the mother appeared. ‘I was in the bathroom, you know I have a weak bladder,’ she said. I took the two of them aside. ‘I was always worried what would happen to you if I had to be parted from you,’ the mother said. ‘That’s why I allowed you to always hold my hand. Of course



It’s so easy for hands to let go

road. As she and her mother were getting off the bus, the mother remembered that her small Quran was still on the seat. They were seated one row from the front, so the daughter let go of her mother’s hand, turned around, took one step back onto the bus, retrieved the Quran, turned back onto the step leading off the bus and looked for her mother. She was nowhere to be seen.

The daughter was frantic. I was at the back of the bus assisting some elderly when I heard the daughter’s sobs. I was not too concerned as I knew that we always counted each person disembarking, grouped them, and then had one of the group offi-

it feels special, but the truth is that on Hajj there are many watching me, listening to me, always there for me. I can never be lost here my child, and I don’t want you to be either. She took her daughter’s hand. ‘Allah guards those who ask to be guided. Let keep faith in our Creator.’ I saw them at the time of Wuqoof. They were not holding each other’s hand, but they stood next to each other hands outstretched. They were like all other pilgrims, holding on to the prayer that Allah will accept their pleas and never let go of his eternal blessings.

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