

Hajj Stories

Life's Circles

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Dr Salim Parker

‘Salaam. Are you the group doctor?’ she asked. The wisdom and evident worldwide experience emanating from her eyes belied her very youthful appearance and demeanour. We exchanged pleasantries. We were on Mina and it was the first day of Hajj. ‘I am a doctor, and please call upon me if you need any assistance,’ she said. She was a medical specialist and I thanked her for the offer. As this was her first Hajj and the fact that she was travelling with her family, I knew that I would only call upon her assistance in exceptional circumstances. Time alone to ponder and reach out to our Creator is priceless during the five days of Hajj. Time with our families to reflect, continue and value the close bonds we have with each other reinforces the importance of our social cohesion. Time with the group during collective prayers on Mina and Arafat can be a life changing experience. As workers we certainly never want to deprive anyone of these insights. I thanked her for her offer. ‘May I ask you something?’ she enquired.

‘Of course,’ I replied. ‘Do you remember a certain person?’ she asked. She mentioned the name. How could I ever forget that person! I immediately pictured the

called the Queen of Flowers. My eyes swelled with tears. That lady performed Hajj years ago and I was privileged to attend to her medical needs. In the latter stages of pregnancy, she was quite sick during the five days of Hajj. Yet she endured the trials that Allah tested her with grace, humility and acceptance. She had a very supportive husband and wonderful people in her Hajj group who assisted her as much as they could. I can still vividly picture her sitting in a wheelchair. Her chest was tight and she struggled to breathe. Yet she had a content smile on her face, like a flower in full bloom. She was on Hajj, she was as close to our Creator as was humanly possible, her husband was next to her, and in her womb her baby was cocooned from the outside world.

Her Hajj was ultimately fulfilled. The journey lives in our mind and souls forever. Some young people will live with those memories for decades. She was not that fortunate however as, soon after giving birth, she was diagnosed with cancer. Her smile, her spirit and her outlook were still in full bloom but her physical fibre succumbed to the incessant advance of the malignancy. Though she was in the budding

stage of her adult life, Allah recalled her. I still pondered at the loss by her husband of his beloved wife being nuanced by the gift of another child. As a kindergarten teacher, her life always revolved around children. The circle of life is indeed not always smooth and often punctuated with the unexplained and unexpected. I could not attend her janaaza as she resided in a city

she never met his now deceased first wife. We did not really have time to chat for long but the little glimmer of her life that I got insight into proved fascinating. She immersed herself into studies and travel during her student years. There was the small matter of a Rugby World Cup in an overseas country during her student years. With a group of friends, they waltzed off to Eu-

lation’s normal lifespan. ‘So when are you getting married?’ I asked recently. I was fully aware that marriage celebrations and other social events were not permitted during the lockdown phase of the pandemic. ‘Insha-Allah we’ll have to wait and see,’ she replied before wickedly adding: ‘We would not want to deprive our families of some really good tasting breyani!’ I of

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thousands of kilometers away. I did make a point of visiting her husband later and marveled at how he was trying to cope with two young children. Life would have to carry on for them without their reassuring familiar fragrance.

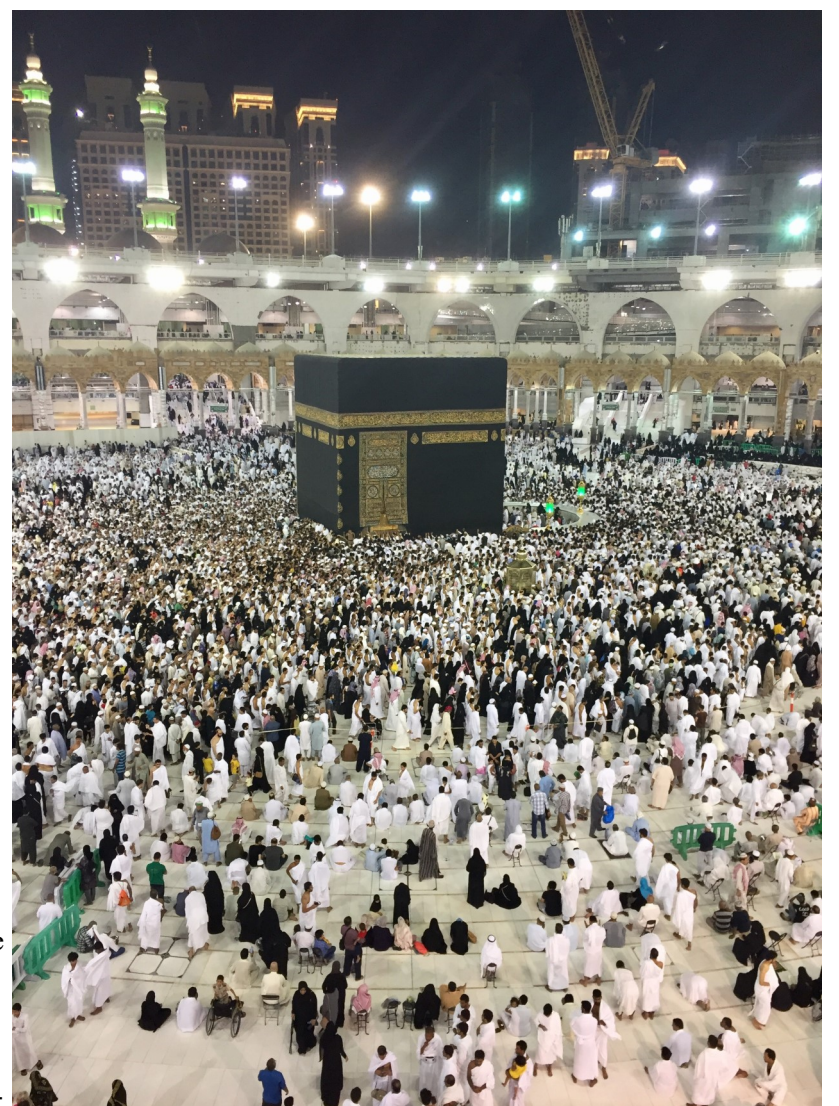
Now, a few years later on Mina, on the first day of Hajj I was left wondering why a fellow doctor was asking me about her. I managed to chat to her between seeing patients. ‘I was requested to introduce myself to you,’ she said. ‘By who?’ I enquired. She mentioned the person’s name. It happened to be the husband that has kept in contact with me since we performed Hajj together. He would always ask what he could contribute towards making the life of Hujjaaj easier. One year he offered to donate wheelchairs for the use of pilgrims as there is always a shortage of it during the journey. This was especially true during the five days of Hajj, and unscrupulous cartels would then charge exorbitant fees for merely transporting an injured or sick person from one point to another. In fact, on one occasion the cost of such a one-kilometer journey was twice the price of a new wheelchair. What I recall of him was the effort he put in to transport his very sick wife in a wheelchair during the five days of Hajj and especially the arduous journey from Mina to the safety of their hotel room. His wife was the queen of flowers.

‘He asked me to convey his greetings to you,’ the doctor said. I thanked her and it was abundantly evident that the two of them knew each other well. They were planning to get married in the future and she explained that

rope for a once in a crazy student life escapade. Always a good sport, she was admired by many for her courage and enthusiasm. After graduating as a doctor, she pursued further studies and specialized in public health. There were the upheavals that inevitably we all encounter in life and

course threatened to gatecrash their big day if I was not invited. Insha-Allah, that day will soon come.

I often reflect on how Hajj leads to me to meet so many different people. I only met the two ladies embracing this particular circle during Hajj. Two very different,



No two circumambulations of the Kaba’a are ever the same

she managed to navigate her way through some turbulent times.

She was doing her doctorate when the coronavirus pandemic struck globally. True to her deeply patriotic and selfless nature she joined a national project to analyse and make sense of the information overload that accompanied the disease. Daily, she scrutinised information about a condition that was depriving years off mostly the older popu-

yet truly unique personalities. There can never be comparisons drawn as their life trajectories never intersected. One tiptoed around small buds still to bloom, the other making sense of information in order to extend the gradual natural journey into the west where the sun is setting. May love smile and Allah’s blessings shower unto all; always.

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