

Hajj Stories

Time Does Not Always Heal

August 2022



Dr Salim Parker

‘There is not enough salt in the food,’ her husband complained. The two of them, together with their adult children, were sitting together as a family for supper. She got up, walked out of the room, out of her home, and out of decades of marital union. She walked to a family member’s house and was never to return to her marital dwelling. Her children were stunned. They initially could not understand what could have triggered such a reaction to a seemingly innocuous remark. She was not one for speaking much and the dearth of apparent reasons for such a drastic action from their mother made them develop a hostile attitude towards her. Her husband was even more perplexed. As far as he was concerned, he did not raise his voice and he was not rude or physically abusive. To the outside world her behaviour was utterly irrational.

The first day of Hajj was five days away when she came to consult me about her medical conditions. I do not normally know much about the social and domestic backgrounds of pilgrims. Those who consult me in South Africa about their medical conditions before commencing their travels sometimes reveal

intimate details about their lives. I often feel privileged to be part of their journey, knowing what impossible odds some overcame before being able to stand on Arafat. The greetings, the prayers, the tears and the smiles of each individual are the culminations of so many infinitely different factors. One will shed tears of joy for finally and ultimately being on Arafat. Another’s tears will be coloured with the rainbows of those etched in their hearts, but with evaporating realization that they are no more with us. Others cry about a life that may have been, but never was.

What always fascinates me about Arafat is the shroud of uniformity that our Ihrams confer upon us blanketing away our differences in race, our educational status and which rung of the societal ladder we either cling unto or have been forced unto. It cannot however suppress our emotions and our fears. Anyone observing pilgrims on Arafat will marvel at the divine decree that on this day we are all equal in submitting to our Creator. However, we all have our fears, especially the fear that Allah will not forgive us on this day and that our Hajj will not be accepted because of our

inadequacies and our fears that our perceived sins are unforgivable. It was this that I sensed during our consultation those few days before Hajj. It was not her high blood pressure or diabetes that was not optimally controlled. Rather it was her fear that her past would forever blemish her Hajj.

It was the first time ever that I met her and I was blissfully unaware of her past. It was evident that she was extremely anxious,

but she denied being on any medication for that. After we optimized her medication usage for the forthcoming most important days in the life of a Muslim, a slightly discernable trickle of her fears surfaced. Within a few sentences the different tributaries merged, culminating in her emotions flooding, cascading over all the rocks that formed impediments throughout the maelstroms of her life. ‘Will my Hajj be accepted?’ she suddenly asked me. She started relating her past. She spoke of her marriage at a young age when she accepted cultural norms masquerading as religion. She was raised to perform duties, duties to parents, to society and when she married, to her husband. These were accepted without question and had to be unquestionably obeyed.

‘For more than twenty years I was physically abused by my husband,’ she related. By the time she had the courage to inform her parents about it, she already had two children. ‘Stay in the marriage for their sake,’ she was told. And she did. But she also started to learn more about her religion. That Islam is infinitely merciful, that it recognizes that not all marriages are blissfully happy and that it is permitted to separate respectfully if all means of reconciliation fails. Over the years she engaged with mediation. The physical abuse stopped. However the emotional abuse increased. Initially the physical and emotional trauma was evident, with the children often witnessing it. When the beatings, pushing around and shavings stopped, the children were relieved. Their

father at last has changed! The emotional abuse was subtle when the eyes of society were open but was blatant behind closed doors.

For their children life now had a semblance of normality. They could now have conversations at the dinner tables whereas previously all would merely top up their daily caloric requirements in morbid silence. One of the children actually mentioned to her university friends that she had the perfect family. ‘The

lucky that the physical violence has stopped. Her children were similarly ecstatic for the same reason and were oblivious to the constant degradation she was enduring. One evening she mentioned that they should consider performing Hajj. He burst out laughing and told her that she does not have any inkling what the pilgrimage was about.

Later, whilst having dinner, he remarked that there was not enough salt in the food. Their

“For more than twenty years I was physically abused by my husband ”

whole world was deceived!’ she cried. ‘I was suffering even more but the world was oblivious to it because there were no physical scars.’ Her husband told her in no uncertain terms what a pathetic wife she was, how he was absolutely amazed that their children turned out to be good citizens despite her appalling mothering skills, and that he was surprised that no one else in their circle ever mentioned her shortcomings to her. It would not be

two children heard that. ‘Just like there is no understanding in your tiny brain about going on Hajj,’ he sneeringly smirked softly to her. The children did not hear that. All they know was that their mother walked out of their home. They till this day do not comprehend what happened and why she reacted in that way. It took them a while to start communicating with her again and by the time she left for Hajj they had a relatively normal relationship.



Allah’s mercy is infinite

very evident to the outside world as no one really noticed when he told her not to droop her shoulders, or that she used an inappropriate phrase.

She pleaded with him to stop and he pledged whenever she threatened to end the marriage that he would. That promise never lasted more than a few days. She spoke to several professionals who offered to speak to them as a couple, but he never found the need to attend. ‘I have not lifted my hand for years now and never will again. I have changed, have I not?’ was his protestation. Her family thought that she was

‘I’ll never paint their father in a bad light,’ she told me. ‘Allah must please forgive me and accept my Hajj.’ We spoke for a while more and later than evening we arranged for a scholar to reassure her that Allah judges our intentions and what is in our hearts, and not what society says. I saw her on Arafat. There was no smile and no tears. Importantly there was no fear, just a belief that Allah always accepts the Hajj of those who truly reach out. Labaik!

salimparker@yahoo.com