

Hajj Stories

Life is Worth Living

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Dr Salim Parker

‘I always said that my child was worth dying for. I would do anything to save the life of any of my children, even if I had to sacrifice my own life. I suppose we all have that approach as parents,’ he told me. It was about two weeks before the first day of Hajj. He consulted me about the usual cough and sore throat that afflicted virtually every pilgrim at least once during the Holy Journey. He informed me that we had met a few years before but I for the life of me could not place him. He smiled. ‘Doc, I do not blame you for not recognizing me,’ he smiled. I stammered something along the line that I meet a lot of people and cannot always recount every encounter. ‘No Doc, no need to apologise. A lot of people do not recognize me nowadays, not even some of my family members who have not seen me for a while,’ he added.

His weight was appropriate for him. He was not particularly athletic, but he definitely did not show features of ill health when I examined him except for a runny nose. ‘I was obese, ate whatever I liked, never exercised, and was told that my blood pressure and sugar levels were borderline. My

doctor emphasized that these were diseases of lifestyle. He could give medication to control it but would prefer for me to do something about it,’ he told me. ‘I agree with what your doctor advised,’ I replied. ‘Giving medicine in such a case is to mop a floor continuously where a tap is leaking. It makes much more sense to simply fix the tap! Clearly you heeded his advice. Your blood pressure and sugar levels are perfect, you are on no medication and your viral infection I’ll sort out for you,’ I said. ‘Actually, I never did anything for years until I was shocked out of my comfort zone,’ he said.

He proceeded to relate his life-changing experience. His teenage daughter developed an infection which caused her kidneys to fail. She had no underlying medical conditions and this event struck them like a bolt of lightning. His daughter went from a netball playing ball of energy to one who was going to need a kidney transplant. The family was tested to see who could possibly donate a kidney to her. He happened to be the closest possible match. ‘I was the best when it came to the tests Doc, but I was the worst when the risks of

the operation were considered. I was a sitting duck for complication from the surgery and my recovery may have been protracted, I actually wondered who was going to be the real patient if the transplant was going to take place; me or my daughter.’

‘My daughter did not want me to

Kaba’a whilst circumambulating the centre of the Muslim universe. I tend to walk fast but speed is relative. Some sprint to get done, others with medical and physical impairments struggle to satisfy the requirements of the ritual but all ultimately want to reap the reward. Tawaaf was

my debt to Allah and simultaneously convey my appreciations by performing Hajj. So here I am relishing every moment before the days of Hajj arrive.’

He looked truly at ease and at peace despite his viral infection. He informed me that he wanted to bring along his family but

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risk the transplant. She felt that if she succumbs to her kidney failure, her mother and young siblings would still have me to care for them. If I passed away due to surgery complications, they all would have no one with a source of income. That is when I decided to do something about my lifestyle,’ he added. ‘I always said that my child was worth dying for; now I realised that she was worth living for. I had a good look at myself and I did not like what I saw and felt. I always tired easily, slept a lot and never really appreciated the beautiful area that I lived in. I started eating more responsibly and started exercising. Luckily, I never smoked. I started feeling better, lost weight, slept less, had much more energy and felt mentally alert on a much higher level.’

‘The transplant was a success and both of us recovered very quickly. My family was amazed at my transformation even though I definitely do not look like Tarzan. We started regular family walks and other physical activities. My daughter, even though she was on a multitude of medications, started joining us and she is even fitter than I am. A change of mindset really led to a more fulfilling life for all of us,’ he concluded.

We started talking about the value of living a healthy lifestyle. ‘We have all noticed Doc performing a Tawaaf on the roof of the Haram every evening,’ he grinned. ‘It is not an exercise programme!’ I protested. I explained that I enjoy running and walking and that the Tawaaf regime suited me perfectly. It was an immensely spiritually rewarding time that I had all to myself looking at the

unique to one place on earth only. It was my time with my Creator and even though I was moving, my mind and spirit was completely still. It also prepared me for the rigours of Hajj which, even though it is a spiritual journey, also demands considerable physical efforts.

‘I know some of the physical aspects already,’ he indicated. ‘Just walking from the hotel to the Haram in Madina five times a day covered a few kilometers. Our Umrah on arrival in Makkah was also physically demanding. In fact, soon after I recovered from the transplant operation, we had an Eid-ul Adhaa family gathering at my house. We watched the pilgrims on Arafat and I realised that I had to thank my Crea-

could only afford the journey for himself and his wife. His daughter and other two children were still young and they were content that Allah would grant them the opportunity to stand on the plains of Arafat one day. I dispensed some medication to him, advised him to rest as much as possible for a few days and assured him that he would be just fine when we leave for the valley of Mina on the first day of Hajj.

It is ironic that we all yearn to perform Hajj before Allah recalls us one day. Some consider it an end-of-life journey. Standing on Arafat on the Day of Wuqoof is the beginning of a new life. We should not look at Hajj as a journey to be undertaken before we die. We should look at it to start living.



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tor for gifting me and my family more time with each other. Doc, you combine your exercise with performing a Tawaaf. In the same way I felt that I could repay

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