

Hajj Stories

Small yet Bothersome

January 2022



Dr Salim Parker

We all have something magnetic in us that leads to people and other worldly matters gravitating to a particular person, and roads all leading to a common destination. Of course the journey of Hajj as the ultimate physical and spiritual journey needs no elaboration upon. There are other much more nuanced examples in life. We all remember a particular teacher who had a gift of drawing crowds by merely reciting a few lines of poetry. Many of us flocked to attend to recitation of the Holy Quran by those blessed with the most melodious of voices which reverberated the emotional meaning of Allah's revelations. There unfortunately exists the opposite negative effects of these types of attractions with history being replete of dictators and even current democratically elected politicians able to evoke barbarism in seemingly ordinary people. I unfortunately seem to attract something so ordinary yet so bothersome.

If I am in a crowd of thousands, and there is only one of it around, it will find me. Whether I am well covered, it will find a miniscule open spot on me. Using measures to keep it away works wonders to all those who consult me in my travel medicine

clinic, except for me. In my field there is very little that I do not know about ensuring that they are not attracted to me but even the latest innovations fails to deter them from zooming unto me. We have to bear in mind that they have been around much longer than us mere mortals and have successfully navigated many different epochs of our blue planet's history. They spread disease leading to death in different parts of the world. Less importantly, but still considerably annoyingly, they feed on you causing some degree of discomfort and an uncontrollable desire to scratch the area they feasted on.

'Do not kill anything whilst in a state of Ihram,' the Imam belled. We were in a large hotel conference room just outside Mina a few days before the first day of Hajj was to commence. 'What is the penalty if you swat an ant or fly sitting on your arm in a reflex reaction?' one of the pilgrims asked. The Imam went to great lengths to point out why the avoidable killing of any creature whilst in the state of Ihram is prohibited. 'We have to be all aware of sanctity of the Hajj areas and the preciousness of life,' he explained. In Islam we respect

all of Allah creations and when we slaughter animals for consumption, we make Duaa and thank our Creator for the sustenance provided and end the life of the animal in the most humane way possible,' he explained.

He expanded on the number of prohibitions that existed whilst in Ihram. 'Allah is well aware of our weaknesses and shortcomings

of nuisance value. The Imam then reiterated that though harmful creatures may be killed in exceptional circumstances while the pilgrim is in Ihram, great caution should be taken not to kill any of Allah's creations unnecessarily.

'We are sitting with a problem,' the group leader said when we were on Mina on the first day of

may be, it has led to plenty of debates amongst differing scholars about its permissibility and whether a penalty should be paid or not. As one pilgrim once put it to me: 'If the learned amongst us cannot reach consensus, then I would rather err and pay a penalty than to have niggling doubts about the validity of my Hajj.' As group leaders we had to ensure that we made the Hajj as

"Do not kill anything whilst in a state of Ihram"

ings. Hajj is also a once in a lifetime journey. That is why if we somehow transgress, we may pay a penalty. There are very few instances where the Hajj will be completely invalidated, one such occasion would be to not be on Arafat at all. The prohibition on edible game and even locusts is well described and may incur a penalty to be paid. When it comes to harmful creatures then killing them out of necessity is permissible. If you see a fly on you hand rather shake it off than kill it,' he answered.

'But what about mosquitoes?' a fellow pilgrim asked. Those silent assassins that seek my sweet blood! 'How dangerous are they in Saudi Arabia?' the Imam

Hajj. It was raining and the Hujjaaj were overjoyed that they were gifted such an exceptional experience. 'Nothing can be a problem, the pilgrims are all settled, we have busses arranged very early for tomorrow morning to transport them to Arafat. Yes, ideally we would have wanted to leave after Fajr salaah, but the authorities have indicated that because of the crowds, they will take us at three in the morning already,' the Imam replied. 'That and the rain is exactly the problem,' the group leader replied. 'We are going to have swarms and even tornadoes of mosquitoes forming part of the reception. We cannot ask our pilgrims to apply mosquito repellents as

easy as possible for our pilgrims.

A few of our group left just after midnight for Arafat. There were small puddles of water everywhere, the perfect attraction for the bloodthirsty small monsters. They were everywhere in large numbers, ready to feast like hyenas on a dead carcass. Our pilgrims were to arrive about four hours later, one of the peak feeding times for the mosquitoes. The Saudi authorities go to great lengths to control all pests at the Hajj sites, but the rains complicated their efforts this Hajj. We got hold of some camp assistants who were not in Ihram and they sprayed the whole area that we were to occupy with insecticides. It of course was not possible to

get rid of all the insects but at least we could see the leaves of the few plants in the area which was previously completely covered by swarms.

When our pilgrims arrived about an hour before sunrise there were very few of the feisty blood suckers around. We advised the Hujjaaj to have no exposed limbs and to start preparing for Fajr prayers. With



Tiny blood sucking creatures may not be visible on Arafat but are there

asked me. I explained that malaria is transmitted by mosquitoes and probably killed more humans than any other disease in history. However, the Hajj areas was free of the dreadful calamity. Other diseases that could potentially be carried by mosquitoes were also absent during Hajj. In essence they were more

repellents are scented and not considered permissible.'

The vast majority of pilgrims will only perform Hajj once in their lifetime. No one wants to be left with a lingering doubt that they may have transgressed any of the rules. As trivial as killing an annoying mosquito on Arafat

the advent of the new day and the rising of the sun heralding the most important day in the lives of Muslims, the remaining mosquitoes would dissipate just as we pray that all our sins would be wiped away.

salimparker@yahoo.com