

# Hajj Stories

## Darkness Always Recedes

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### Dr Salim Parker

‘I am on Arafat,’ she said softly. I could barely hear her, but her sense of gratitude and amazement was very, very evident. ‘I should not be alive now, in fact I should have died on three occasions already,’ she continued. She came to see me in the make-shift medical tent just before Wuqoof. It was a blisteringly hot day and she felt dizzy. I examined her and noted that her blood pressure was very low. She admitted to not really eating or drinking enough. ‘I did not feel sick at all until now, I am just so excited to be here that I forgot to pay attention to food. Do not worry, I’ll make sure that mend my ways!’ she laughed. ‘I want to be at my absolute best on this most important day of my life,’ she added. She noted that I was looking at the evident lines on her wrists, a clear indication that there was an attempt to cut them.

‘I tried to kill myself on three occasions Doc,’ she said. ‘The first time after I cut my wrists I was bleeding profusely. For some reason my brother came home much earlier from work than usual and found me unconscious on the floor. He immediately put pressure bandages on my wounds and rushed me to the hospital where I was given sever-

al units of blood. I survived the attempt, but it did not affect my severe depression and suicidal ideation. I was confined to hospital for weeks on end but the shadows and darkness that surrounded me just seemed to intensify. Everyone was telling me how lucky I was to survive and all I felt was being a failure by still being alive. I was called a sinner as suicide is considered one of the biggest crimes in Islam. I could not see my attempts as criminal. But today, as you can see, I am standing on Arafat!’ she said.

I let her continue as it was evident that she needed to speak. She spoke of her second attempt to end her life by swallowing a concoction of tablets. It was enough to render her unconscious, enough to have her hospitalized for a few weeks, enough for to need dialysis as her kidneys failed, but not enough to end her life. ‘Maybe I should have realised then that I was being kept alive for a reason, but the depression persisted. I was discharged from hospital in the care of my family who monitored my each and every move. They made sure I had no access to any way of attempting suicide again and provided my medica-

tion as prescribed. Some were very frustrated with me and others refused to interact with me after a while. I just felt nothing, I saw no purpose to live and wished to end what I considered their burden,’ she continued.

I looked at the radiant lady, who despite her dizziness, was exuding only happiness and contentment and found it difficult to reconcile her with what she described of her past. She was describing a perceived worthless

life and now she was contributing with a select and blessed group to represent the rest of humanity on Arafat. Something clearly happened to have had such a dramatic effect. She related that the medication she was on took some time to take effect and though she did not think

What also happened was that her brother heard strange noises in her room and when she did not respond to his frantic enquiries, he broke down her door, cut the rope and took her straight to hospital. ‘Two things happened there,’ she told me. ‘They changed my medications to novel experimental ones. More importantly in my mind was that the nurse who attended to me had just returned from Hajj. This nurse did not just speak of a jour-

I asked the nurse and the few family members who visited me about the journey. Books were given to me and my desire to embark on the journey was ignited and grew exponentially. One doctor thought I was using my new-found rational sounding interest in Hajj as a way of appearing normal and one of my siblings saw it as a new obsessive disorder compounding my already severe depression. Previously any negative comments or

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ney to Arabia. She spoke of a life altering and soul awaking revelation.’

I checked her blood pressure again and it was improving. She was taking sips of zam-zam and having some juice as well. I encouraged her to sit on a chair when she prays during the time

attitudes would aggravate my mental state but this time around it made me more determined. It took weeks before I was considered fit for discharge, and another few months before I was considered to be normal by society. Do I appear normal to you Doc?’ she asked.



Allah reveals the light after a period of darkness

about death for a while, the side effects of the drugs made her feel very machine-like. She went through the motions of getting up in the morning, going to work, returning home and then getting into bed again. Her daily purpose served no purpose other than continuing an endless cycle of monotony.

‘One day I was so frustrated that I tried to hang myself Doc,’ she continued. The rope however was luckily too long and she found herself touching the floor with her toes. She is not certain whether that was her jolt back to reality as she felt the life extracting pressure on her neck being relieved when she stretched out her feet and stood on her toes.

of Wuqoof, the peak time of the Hajj and only stand if comfortable. ‘I want to stretch out my hand far into the sky whilst standing on my toes!’ she said. ‘The doctors say it was the new medication that they introduced that finally paved the way to my recovery. I don’t think so. I think it was the seed planted about Hajj that made me wonder and think. I was on a journey to nowhere, with no beginning and no end. This nurse spoke of a journey that opens up so many doors and gates. Whichever one you enter through leads to even more expansions yet closer to Allah,’ she recounted.

‘I never thought of performing Hajj before that time in hospital.

‘You are more normal than this doctor!’ I smiled. She told me that she is still taking her medication regularly and wanted to stop it. I advised that a physically and psychologically challenging journey like Hajj is not a good time to think about that. She was on a spiritual and emotional high and I wanted her to maintain that until she was back home. It was getting to the time of Wuqoof. ‘Am I ready to be as close to my Creator as humanly possible?’ she asked, doubt seeming to manifest itself. ‘You are here, you have arrived,’ I responded and we exited the confining tent and gazed over the vast Arafat plains. ‘Labaik!’

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