

# Hajj Stories

## Acceptance

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### Dr Salim Parker

Life is full of coincidences. Hajj awakens the eyes and the soul. It also provides answers, sometimes in remarkable ways. Perhaps it has something to do with my occupation as a doctor during this holiest of journeys where and when I have the privilege to meet the most diverse and amazing human beings. Of course, there are the occasional interactions which I want to permanently delete from my memory, but the vast majority of souls reveal heart touching and memorable narratives. Most are conclusive in nature, with the pilgrim themselves satisfied with how their journeys to Arafat evolved, even though the road traversed many crevices and potholes. There are the occasional roads not taken and the regrets of a lifepath abandoned. There was one instance of two pilgrims, who performed their Hajj three years apart, for whom I could provide some continuation merely by being blessed to be on Hajj.

‘I never managed to ask to be forgiven by the person against whom I committed unforgivably bad deeds,’ he said. ‘I do not think Allah will accept my Du-aas, repentance and my Hajj,’ he added. His initial reason for consulting me was a throat irritation.

It was evident though that he was extremely anxious. It was still early in the morning, with most of the pilgrims in my group enjoying their breakfast at the luxurious hotel in Makkah where we were staying. New friendships were being forged and the social interactions were warm and homely. The first day of Hajj was still three weeks away. I went to my makeshift consulting room a bit early to check my medical supplies and he noticed me getting up from my breakfast table and followed me. Though it was still about twenty minutes before opening hours, I invited him into the room and we started chatting.

He was from a large city in the north of South Africa and started to tell me of his background. He came from a very conservative Muslim family rooted in traditions. Whilst in his final year at a university far from his home city, he met a carefree spirit who, though having occasionally attended church services, did not have any interest or inclination towards any religion. Their relationship grew and everyone on campus knew them to be attracted to each other. His final examinations were approaching, and he knew that his life would never

again be the same. He would graduate and return home, and he needed to make a decision about his marital future. They occasionally spoke about marriage, how she would adopt Islam and live happily ever after. He never paid attention to any larger social and family ramifications until he was faced with the inevitability of deciding.

‘I left her a note saying that I cannot continue the relationship. I was scared of facing my family. I am now even more ashamed that I considered that, her being a Christian, my actions were acceptable. I realised afterwards that it was utterly reprehensible. I did not even speak to my family about her. I simply copped out and, in my mind, blocked out that part of my life. She returned to her small country town and thereafter left to teach in some Middle Eastern country. I got married and have two children now. My life seems complete to the outside world. I told my wife that I had a university crush on a girl but that is in the past. I love my wife and cannot imagine a life without her. It is the guilt that is hounding me, not any other issues,’ he said.

‘was?’ he said. He could not stop talking. Regret, sorrow and remorse was evident. It was however conveyed to someone who seemed completely uninvolved. I let him speak and realised that I actually was not dissociated with his history. I asked him a few questions and it was soon evident that I could link the two people involved. He soon realised that I knew who she was.

### “I can assure you that she has forgiven you”

‘How do you know her?’ he asked. ‘Because of you,’ I replied. He was dumbstruck. ‘I don’t understand,’ he said. ‘Doc, I just met you for the first time in my life,’ he continued. I concurred. ‘But she will forever be grateful to you,’ I added. ‘You indirectly invited her to Islam even though religion was never a focus in your relationship. She was intrigued by your religion but was always too shy to ask you directly. Instead, she went to read up on her own. After receiving your letter, she of course was heartbroken and devastated. However, she had Islam in her

her wonderful journey discovering our religion. She wanted to answer the call made by Prophet Ibrahim thousands of years ago, complete the fifth pillar of Islam and repay her debt to her Creator as soon as possible. That is why, a year after she got married, she and her husband embarked on their ultimate journey. She received the message late in her life, but she felt that she wanted

to experience standing on Arafat as soon as it was possible for her. She worked close to Saudi Arabia, but as a South African she was assigned to our camp. That is how we met when she fell ill one day,’ I explained. ‘She has forgiven each and every one who may have hurt her,’ I reiterated.

‘Maybe I must start all learning more and more and discover more of our great religion,’ he said. ‘Accept what happened, connect with our Creator on Arafat and on the days of Hajj. Part of Hajj is to believe that Allah’s capacity to forgive exceeds ours

to sin. It would be wrong to believe that Allah will not forgive you if you truly repent,’ I concluded. He nodded, greeted and left.

I met both of them only once in my life. I never saw or heard from them during their days of Hajj or ever after. Time may have separated my meetings with them. However, time bonded the two events, merged them, and resulted in a denouement that again epitomized how some-

how, somewhere an answer will be summonsed to a vexing question. For all of us Hajj results in in effect being cleansed and being innocent like a newborn child. For that to happen we need to believe that Allah’s mercy has truly descended unto us. ‘Labaik!’

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We have to believe Allah’s mercy will descend on the plains of Arafat

‘Did you try to contact her before you departed for Hajj?’ I asked. ‘No,’ he said. ‘Yes, I know I can go onto Facebook or other social media and try to trace her. I am sure some of my university friends are still in contact with her and they would most likely put me in touch with her. I admit to being a coward. What if she said that she does not forgive me? What if she told me what a pathetic human being I

life and she worked on learning more and more about her Deen. She accepted what Allah set out for her during her discovery of her new complete way of life. She got married to someone who had similar interests and they performed Hajj three years ago,’ I informed him.

‘I can assure you that she has forgiven you,’ I said. ‘She consulted me as a patient three years ago and she started telling me