

HAJJ STORIES

PALESTINE: LAND OF FREE MINDS

DECEMBER 2023

‘Your president Nelson Mandela said that South Africa’s freedom will be incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians,’ he said. ‘True, South Africa will not be free until Palestine is free,’ I replied. We were sitting on the first floor of the Holy Mosque in Makkah with a very limited view of the Kaaba. Only those donned in Ihram were allowed onto the ground floor to circumambulate the Qibla of the Muslim universe, the rest of us were confined to the other floors which increased the distance to be covered and time taken nearly tenfold. The first day of Hajj 2023 was a few days away and the two of us had just completed our Tawaaf and were waiting for the time of the sunset prayers. He hailed from the vicinity of Al Aqsa Masjid in Palestine, and we spoke extensively of the harassment that he faced on a daily basis.

‘South Africa has always been supportive of our struggle,’ he said. ‘We have developed strong bonds with many from your country who come to visit. What we really appreciate is that there is a strong sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. We are not pitied, we are understood. We do not seek handouts; we need acknowledgement that our cause is just. All assistance, even if in your Duaas, is accepted by our Creator. We are being tested and sometimes we feel overwhelmed. However, we know Allah is the ultimate planner and conditions will change for the better as our Lord will not let his subjects suffer for an indeterminate time. Our Liberation will come. I am so privileged, see I am here for Hajj!’ he exclaimed. He explained that though it took him a while to get from the West Bank to Saudi Arabia, it paled into insignificance to the hardships that his fellow pilgrims from Gaza endured.

‘My brothers and sisters from Gaza wait nearly a day for a bus to take them to Egypt. Then they spend more than a day on the bus and have endless hassles at the border crossings. They really live in the largest open-air prison in the world and are subject to endless harassment. However, though their bodies are imprisoned, their minds are free. We know that everything is at the will of our Creator and our freedom will come when Allah decrees it. The oppressors are increasingly restricting our movements, our supplies and our activities. Sometimes it feels that they are extracting all the oxygen from the air and squeezing it all out of our lungs and letting us feel as we are asphyxiating. But we are hopeful. The fact that we are here for Hajj already shows our Lord smiling on us,’ he said.

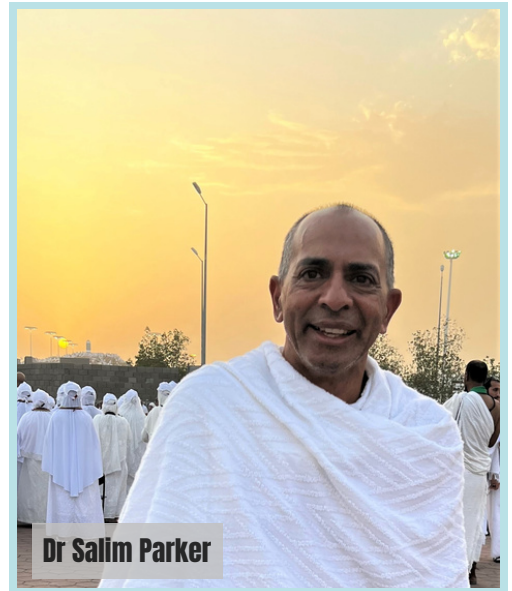
I have met a number of Palestinians over the last three decades. The hallmark of them all is their unflinching faith, their humility, their resilience, and their refusal to

be condemned to eternal slavery. Another absolute aspect is what they ask for. ‘We welcome all help, but we do not beg,’ he told me. ‘Unless you consider asking us you to make Duaa for us as begging. Then I am a willing beggar,’ he smiled. ‘Our victory will surely come, as history has shown that oppressors can never survive. They may be deceived that they are invincible, and that they have the backing of large superpowers, but their decline and fall is inevitable. Our Creator has clearly stated so and we all firmly believe that liberation is not far away,’ he concluded. I could only admire his positive outlook on life when many others would have been wailing in despair and depression.

“South Africa will not be free until Palestine is free”

Later, on Arafat, I reflected on his words when Duaas for the liberation of Palestine were made. I thought of how free the minds of our Palestinian brothers and sisters are, despite their physical imprisonment. Everyone around on those vast plains was dressed in Ihram. The restrictions of Ihram are often alluded to but here the liberation of the compulsory garb was evident. All were freed from being bound to earthly material values, with the universal message of prayer and forgiveness embracing all. Everyone had their own specific prayers and wishes, as well as their universal Duaas. Arafat is such an amazing amalgamation of the miniscule and the mountainous. An atom is a component of a molecule, which in turn may be part of an organ found in a particular person standing as part of a unified Ummah at the time of Wuqoof. Allah is aware of each and every proton and electron making up an atom.

A few months later the latest insurgency into Gaza took place. I was invited to deliver a talk in Saudi Arabia and of course was not going to miss the chance to perform Umrah. ‘Please make Duaa for



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the liberation of Palestine,’ was the only request of virtually everyone who greeted me before my departure. It was illustrative that the Western media concentrated on the initial Hamas attack on Israel, and seemingly lost sight of the perpetual Israeli slaughter of Palestinian children and women. One Gaza child was dying every six minutes at one stage. At the conference a gentle giant of a man asked if he could sit at my table during breakfast. I welcomed him and we started chatting. He was working in Saudi Arabia but hailed from Gaza. Just the mere mentioning of the word brought tears to his eyes. ‘We need all your Duaas,’ he pleaded.

‘All aid, whether medical or food and fuel is welcome,’ he said, ‘but your Duaas are the most important.’ We were both aware of the immense unfolding humanitarian tragedy in Gaza. The numbers did not lie; the majority of deaths were amongst children. The attack on Israel was a once off event and the Israeli attacks have been going on for decades. Houses, homes, hospitals and hearts were heaped into rubble and humanity was erased from the oppressors’ minds. There was the continuous ‘explanations’ by the Western media reporting on the genocide, but it became evident that this was a war directed at the innocent either killing or maiming them, or cutting off vital supplies such as water, electricity, and food. ‘The world has to stop this invasion,’ I said. ‘We have many that we can depend on, and sadly as many of our brothers that turned their backs unto us. We know who our enemies are. All we want is our freedom,’ he said.

Again, the freedom of the mind was evident. There was no asking for money, no plea for desperately needed supplies. All they asked for was our prayers and awareness of their plight. A few days later I was blessed to be standing clothed in my Ihram in front of the Kabaa. As I circumambulated it during Tawaaf I could hear the Duaas for the liberation of the nation of Palestine. Some cried and some pleaded. The prayer was universal. Our Creator surely hears these pleas. Our resilient and patient Palestinian brothers and sisters, parents and children, all know that liberation will come.



*Duaas for the liberation of Palestine are accepted everywhere,
especially on Arafat*