

HAJJ STORIES

LIFE CARRIES ON

FEBRUARY 2023

He looked perturbed. It was about two weeks before the first day of Hajj and he was sitting at the breakfast table in his hotel in Makkah. The Sheigh who accompanied his group and I walked past his table and he gestured to us to join him. Around us were an uncountable number of buffet tables, each housing enough exotic foods to feed an army. The dishes ranged from the freshest fruit cuts to imported caviar and Norwegian salmon, yet there was not a single dish in front of him. 'How long have you been sitting here?' the Sheigh asked. He jokingly replied that he has been waiting for us for about thirty minutes. He clearly has been sitting for a while, not touching any of the delectable delicacies. Whatever it was that was bothering him was absorbing all his thoughts and left him with no appetite for weighty earthly calories.

'We were on our own separate island with the tsunamis and gales of family furies swirling like tornadoes around us'

'Is your wife not joining us?' I asked. He explained that she was not feeling too well and that he was to take breakfast to their room for her later. 'She will be visiting you during the course of the day Doc,' he added. I gently enquired about her health, and he assured me that it was not a major problem, just the run of the mill influenza case that confines a person to bed for a day or two. 'I am sure you'll be able to sort her out,' he said. 'My clinic starts in about thirty minutes, so you are welcome to bring her along then,' I said. The worried look on his face was disproportionate to his description of her condition. 'You look very worried,' I said. 'I can definitely see her now if it is needed,' I offered. 'Oh no, that is not necessary. I am uneasy about my wife, but not about her medical condition,' he replied.

The sentences flooded from there. He was married previously, but there were irrevocable differences between their families. His previous wife was pregnant at one stage, but unfortunately had a miscarriage with both families blaming the other for the event that ultimately is determined by our Creator. They parted amicably as far as the two of them were concerned, but their families were feuding over every minute detail of their divorce. He could not bear the constant family tension and moved to another large city. Initially the couple maintained some platonic contact, but their families soon put a stop to it. There he met his present wife. He informed his ex-wife about the happenings in his life and she wished him well. She in turn also remarried and both couples had two children each. They never met each other's spouses and lost contact after a few years.

'And now, after all these years and of all the places in the world, I run into her and her

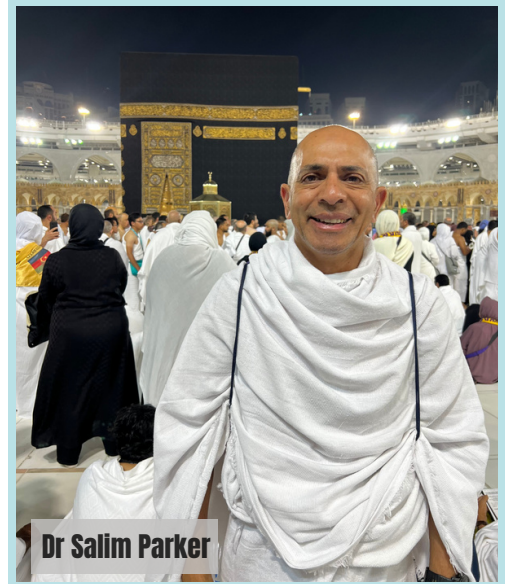
husband here in Makkah! They are also on Hajj. I was walking alone from the Haram when I heard her call my name. I was genuinely surprised but also happy to see her and probably sounded too excited whilst I was talking to them. When she told her husband who I was, I could visibly see his jaw drop and he maintained an icy demeanour thereafter. I quickly excused myself when I noticed this and came back to the hotel,' he informed us. He added that his ex-wife was travelling with a different group and was probably going to stay in one of the upmarket camps on Arafat and Mina from what he could judge from the tags on her bag. It was unlikely that they would meet each other again.

'I am not certain if I should tell my wife that they are also on Hajj,' he confessed. She knows I was

previously married but knows very little about my previous relationship. My ex-wife was a part of me and I shall always cherish the good times, and there were indeed good moments that we shared. We were as close to each other as was humanly possible when we lost our child. It seemed we were on our own separate island with the tsunamis and gales of family furies swirling like tornadoes around us but just brushing the outer edge of our shoreline. There were so many around us, yet we were alone sharing our sorrow,' he said. The Sheigh listened intently. 'We have the greatest of religions,' he said. He then proceeded to gently reassure our troubled Musafir that his feelings are understandable, but Islam most certainly has some solutions.

'Our Deen certainly does not encourage divorce. In fact, couples are advised to exhaust all measures before they embark on the permanent separation. Our religion then strongly indicates that a couple should part on friendly and amicable terms, especially if there are children involved. You do not have children together so there are no ties at all between the two of you. Consider your previous marriage as a learning experience from which Allah made you emerge wiser and more mature. That relationship is now in the past and both of you should consider it as such. When you stand on Arafat remember her, her husband, her children and family in your Duaas. I am sure you went to greet people that you have not seen for decades before you departed for Hajj. Consider her as one of the people that you knew well some time in your life,' the Sheigh sagely advised.

'Do I tell my wife that my ex-wife is also here?' he asked. 'Do you keep any meaningful things from her?' the Sheigh asked. The scholar advised that



Dr Salim Parker

simple honesty and openness prevents suspicions and mistrusts from cascading out of control. We finished our breakfast and he said that he'll bring his wife along soon. I went to my clinic where there were already a few patients waiting. I have seen his wife before as a patient but there was no sign of her during the course of the day. She arrived late in the afternoon, looking the worse for wear. She had a roaring temperature and evidently had a bad infection. Yet she had an innate calmness and I could detect a sense of peace in her presence. Very soon, despite her illness, she started talking.

'My husband told me about the conversation at the breakfast table,' she said. 'I do not know why he thought I would be upset that his ex-wife is also here. I am grateful for the fact that it is through her that I met my husband and have the most complete life imaginable. He told me that her husband did not seemed pleased when he was informed about their previous marriage but that was Allah's will. If I meet them I will certainly talk to them and see where the conversation heads. But we decided that we are not going to actively search for them. We are in Makkah and on numerous occasions when we stood in front of the Kaba'a we reaffirmed our love for each other. In fact he wants to go again as soon as I feel able to go,' she added. There were a few patients waiting so I had to shorten our interactions but I felt deep admiration and respect for her.



Only Allah knows what tale each pilgrim can tell.

I met them on Arafat as they stood as a couple outside our tent. 'We make Duaa for our past, our present and our future, and ask Allah to bless each and every one who was, is and will be integral to our lives,' they told me. 'And also reaffirm your love for each other,' I added. Allahu Akbar!

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