

HAJJ STORIES

JUSTICE DELAYED...

SEPTEMBER 2023

'I am not bitter any more Doc,' he told me. We were sitting in a busy restaurant in Azizyah on the outskirts of Makkah just before midnight. I was scurrying between different buildings in the late evening seeing to some sick pilgrims who found it difficult to attend the clinic which we operated during the day. All these bedbound patients had only one question: 'Doc, am I going to be fine when Hajj starts?' The first day of Hajj was three days away and my standard answer was: 'You rest for three days and I'll ensure you have five sick free days of Hajj.' Pilgrims tended to exert themselves in the days leading up to Arafat and this weakens their immune system leading to them catching infections easily. Rest restores the ability to mount off further attacks. He was one of those who I had to attend to a few times.

"Allah will not forgive me now, and neither will I forgive myself if I do not settle my debts"

He initially accompanied me to my last patient and then, realizing that I did not eat anything since early morning, insisted that I share a meal with him. He consulted me about four times for complicated medical conditions in the preceding weeks and I got to know him relatively well. With each consultation he told me a bit more about himself and it was evident that he had a multitude of medical conditions. In fact, it was so overwhelming that it could lead to depression. He was severely depressed when I saw him at the first visit about one month earlier in Madinah, and luckily, he accepted my explanation that depression was a medical condition and agreed to commence treatment. As I got to know him over the next few weeks, I realised that the cause was not the hardships of immobility, poor breathing capacity and profound heart failure. It was rather his inability to let go of the past.

He was not poor but was significantly wealthier previously. A business deal went wrong and he suffered significant financial losses, and he even had to postpone his Hajj due to a sudden lack of funds. 'I invested nearly all my money with a reputable firm and they went bankrupt, and I lost virtually all my money whilst the firm's boss still drove around in a two million Rand car,' he explained. This boss had guaranteed him a certain percentage of profit monthly, and all his capital money back after five years. What caused his bitterness and eventual depression was that this boss just shrugged off the deal as bad luck and refused to even take his calls. We chatted extensively about accepting what life exposed us to and one of the spiritual leaders finally managed to convince him to leave his financial and psychological hurt in the past.

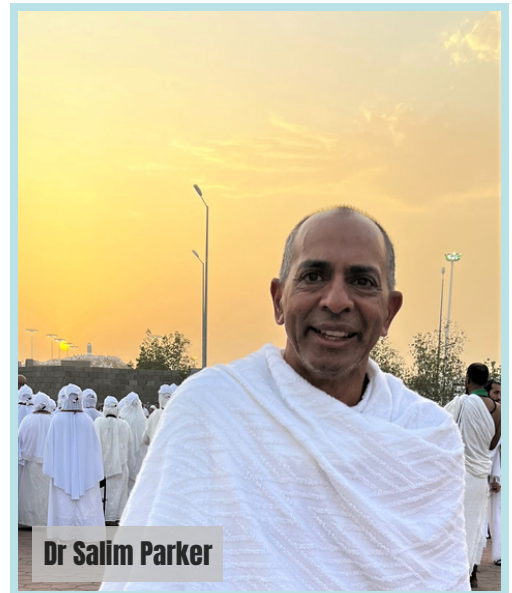
As we shared a meal it was noticeable that his mood was jovial, and he excitedly spoke about the significant days awaiting us. 'I have more than enough in my life. I have no debts, a good caring family and am on Hajj! Yes, I do not have a holiday house anymore but I never thought that I'll perform Hajj due to all my illnesses. In four days time I'll be on Arafat!' he glowed. 'I know you feel great now, I promise you that you'll feel a thousand times more elevated at the time of Wuqoof,' I replied. As I expected, he and the other Hujjaaj were all medically well during our five days, and all of us were immensely grateful to have been blessed to reach Arafat. Whilst there he asked me about stopping his depression medication. 'You have overcome the source, and we can wean you off,' I promised, and we indeed did so.

A few years passed and I was blessed to be able to assist the guests of Allah annually. One year I was fortunate to arrive early in Saudi Arabia and could spend some time with the early arrivals in Madinah. I was asked to see an elderly gentleman who was having respiratory problems. As I entered his room in probably the most expensive hotel in the City of Peace, he was puffing away despite a persistent and debilitating cough. I attended to him, prescribed some medication, chatted about his smoking addiction and asked him to see me again in a few days time in my clinic. He duly did so and thereafter was adamant that he wanted to reimburse me. I explained to him that it was my pleasure and honour to assist. After he left, I found an envelope with a considerable amount of money in it.



Debts need to be settled before reaching Arafat.

I arranged to see him the next day and it transpired that he was a man of immense wealth. One of the Sheighs accompanied me. As we chatted it became clear that he was the same person who owned the firm whose bankruptcy financially ruined my fellow Hajjite of a few years previously. The Sheigh and I travelled together for several years, was aware of the previous Hajjite, and came to the same realization. I politely



Dr Salim Parker

returned the money and indicated that he was more than welcome donate funds for medicines. He was not reluctant to speak about his wealth at all. This intrigued my learned scholar who saw it as an ideal opportunity to engage him about business principles. The businessman saw it as an opportunity to expand on his success. The Sheigh saw it as an opportunity to right a previous wrong.

'Every transaction has inherent risks,' the entrepreneur lectured. 'You lose some, you win some, but if you are smart you can win big, like I do,' he boasted. The Sheigh listened intently and replied: 'That sounds reasonable, but do your investors understand the risk? If you promise someone a certain return, that is not conveying a risk, that is entering a transaction that you are bound to honour.' He explained the situation of our previous Hajjite, but the businessman had absolutely no recollection about him. 'There are obviously two sides to every story,' the Sheigh said. 'Maybe look at that particular transaction. If it was based on taking a risk and the investor was aware of it, you owe nothing. However, if you promised a return as he alleged, you need to honour it before you reach Arafat,' he added. The businessman stood by his contention that he never deliberately conned anyone.

I saw him again for a medical consultation a few days before Hajj. 'I have been chatting to Sheigh and maybe I sold some of my products too optimistically. I had a look at the transaction in question and it was a sure winner according to my sources, so I probably raved about its returns. The seller received the money but disappeared with it before all the paperwork could be completed. I just shrugged it off as one loss among tons of successes. I did not consider the individuals involved,' he told me. 'The other party has forgiven you and moved on,' I replied. 'Allah will not forgive me now, and neither will I forgive myself if I do not settle my debts,' he replied. I never saw him again. But I am sure he descended from the plains of Arafat a few days later as free of sin as a newborn baby.