

HAJJ STORIES

THERE IS ALWAYS SOME LIGHT

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‘If my condition deteriorates, please let the medical staff know that they must not intubate or resuscitate me,’ he said. He had two life-sustaining drips entering his veins and was extremely short of breath and clearly very, very tired. He has been in hospital for two weeks, with very few people visiting him. After all, it was difficult to receive visitors two weeks before Hajj was due to start. This was especially true as he was hospitalized far away from any family member or old friends. Yes, he made a few new friends, but they were in their hotels and transport was difficult and expensive. Being all alone in a seemingly inhospitable ward surrounded by imposing medical machines was surely not beneficial for his mindset. The hospital was in Makkah, thousands of kilometers away from his home in Cape Town. It was his first ever journey away from home and even though he was part of a group, he was very, very alone.

I saw him a few months earlier when he consulted me about travel vaccines. He had heart problems and lung damage due to his heavy smoking. His wife had passed away a year earlier. She had always wanted to perform Hajj and had in fact registered for them to embark on the journey. He, by his own admission, kept delaying it. ‘I just did not feel ready Doc, even though we had the financial means. My wife was patient, but unfortunately Allah recalled her before I came to my senses. When she was on her last, she reminded me of my obligation to my Creator. She never said a word about me deliberately delaying and eventually preventing her from undertaking the once in a lifetime journey. All she asked on her deathbed was that I should keep her in my Duaas when I one day stand on the Day of Wuqoof on the plains of Arafat,’ he told me.

The Imam was with me at his bedside in the Saudi hospital. ‘What happens if I pass away before Hajj starts?’ he asked the scholar. The Imam replied that his Hajj would be accepted as complete as he made the Niyat (intention) and had already left his home for the pilgrimage. ‘So I have a win-win situation,’ he drily smiled. Whether I pass away before Hajj or get to Arafat, I still get my Hajj. What if I am still in hospital on the Day of Arafat?’ was his next question. I explained to him that an ambulance would in such cases transport him there. Even if he was to be on Arafat for a few moments only, it would count towards an accepted Hajj. We told him of cases where pilgrims were flown by helicopter over the plains so that their pilgrimages could be completed.

He reminded me again about his request not to be resuscitated. I was not his regular doctor but have come to know him on this journey. In fact, I was the one who insisted that he should be hospitalized for his heart failure. This was complicated by a germ he picked up in hospital and led to pneumonia. He had a poorly functioning heart, his already damaged lung now had a superadded infection, and he was clearly

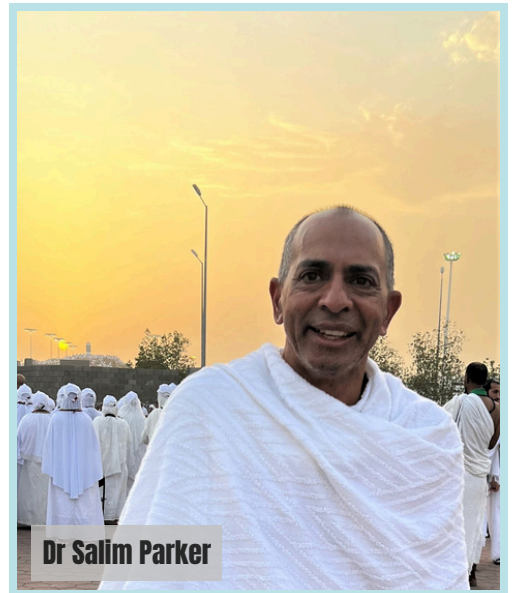
depressed. ‘Let Allah decide,’ I gently advised. ‘What do you think Doc?’ he asked. ‘You have an eminently treatable condition. Yes, you feel miserable mentally, physically very weak, emotionally drained and spiritually in a poor space but these issues are all reversible. You are in a world-class hospital, and we still have some time for you to recover. Everyone is making Duaa that you will join us on Arafat and, Allah willing, you will,’ I replied.

‘What happens if I pass away before Hajj starts?’

He took a while to reply. ‘It would be good if I get better and complete this journey. Then I can always come back and do my wife’s Badl Hajj. At the very least I can arrange for someone to perform Hajj on her behalf if I cannot come back for whatever reason,’ he replied. It was evident that he was riddled with guilt. ‘That would be a good motivation,’ the Imam concurred. We tried as best as we could to motivate him, and recounted stories of a number of previous pilgrims who were much worse off medically than he was and still managed to pull through. There was initially a bit of colour slowly reappearing on his face but then he started sobbing. Years of pent-up emotions, years of claiming that everything was under control gave way to him at last sharing his feelings for the first time.

‘It would have been so rewarding if both me and my wife could have been on this journey. She always said Hajj was all she was living for. She used to joke that there were moments in her life that she wanted to go to her grave with. The first one was when we got married and the second was when we stood together in front of the Kab’a and on Arafat. Unfortunately, her second wish will never come true,’ he expanded. The Imam consoled him and explained that everything is in Allah’s hands and that there are reasons our lives unfold as they do. ‘I am going to get better,’ he said suddenly and firmly. ‘Doc, I leave it to you to decide on any further interventions,’ he informed me suddenly. I was taken by surprise and had to think on my feet.

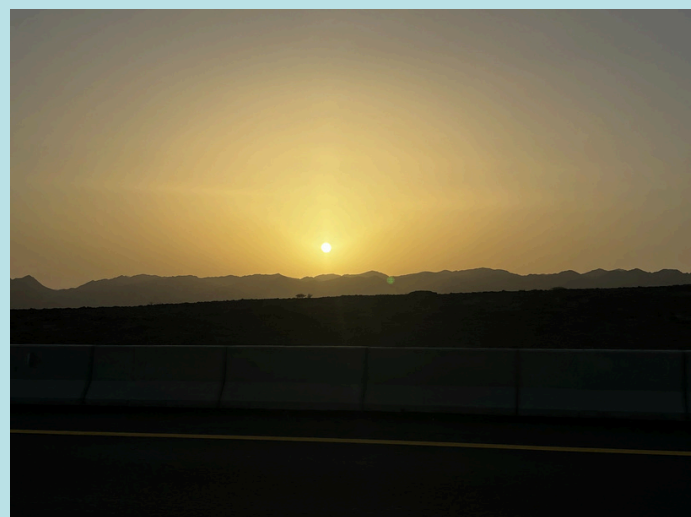
‘There is going to be no need for any concern,’ I said trying to sound authoritative. I assured him again of the treatable nature of his afflictions,



Dr Salim Parker

of the superb hospital he was in and the brilliant medical staff that was treating him, and the immeasurable power of Duaa that everyone was making for him. ‘It is truly a win-win situation,’ the Imam said. That was probably the medicine he needed. When I visited him two days later he was sitting up, and smilingly complained that the physiotherapist was forcing him to walk a marathon. He was discharged from hospital and when he arrived at our hotel, insisted on walking up the one flight of stairs to his room. He did not sprint but managed to do it even though it was taxing on his body. ‘Just watch, on the first day of Hajj I am going to walk the two kilometers from my hotel to Mina!’ he exclaimed.

Of course he did not do that walk. But he got very comfortably on the bus that took us there. The next day I happened to be on the same bus that took us to Arafat. He was never going to walk more than fifty meters without needing to rest but he now knew his capabilities and tried his physical best within his capabilities. ‘I never ever thought I’ll set foot here,’ he said when we stepped onto the sacred grounds. We then walked to our tent, and he sat down absolutely speechless. He did not need to say anything. We knew the reason why he survived was his need to atone. He was repaying the patience, endurance and gentle inspiration of his late wife. She may have departed but she imparted a new spirit in him which came to fruition on this journey. ‘Labaik!’ he had indeed arrived.



To some it may be the sun setting, to others the beginning of a bright new day