

HAJJ STORIES

UNEXPECTED HAJJ GIFT

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'You just don't listen!' I exasperatedly exclaimed. 'It is over fifty degrees outside, the midday sun is blazing, you are not the greatest with directions, and yet you spent more than two hours outside!' I added. We were now in an air-conditioned tent on Arafat, and he was consuming an inordinate amount of fluids and sponging himself with damp cloths in front of a fan. He did not show symptoms of heat illness, unlike close to three thousand others that day. In fact, we learnt a few days later that more than one thousand three hundred guests of Allah passed away due to heat stroke on that and subsequent days. He was more bothered by a groin rash that he had just developed as it caused discomfort when he was walking. However, the most evident feature of him was his big smile and the radiance emanating from his face.

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'I cannot believe that I am here! I am on Arafat! I am on Hajj!' he exclaimed. Most of us had lunch already except him and another pilgrim who accompanied him to Jabal Rahmah, the Mountain of Mercy. How could I still castigate him? I advised him to go there late afternoon when it was cooler and less crowded. He clearly did not heed my advice and joined hundreds of thousands who emulated those who were blessed to have listened to the Last Sermon of our beloved Prophet (SAW) centuries ago. He clearly felt that he achieved what he set out to do so far. 'I do not believe that I actually am here now,' he said. 'I mean I had no means, no intention before a few weeks ago to embark on this most Holy of journeys,' he said. A large platter, enough to feed ten people, somehow appeared and we all, sitting in a circle, indulged in the feast.

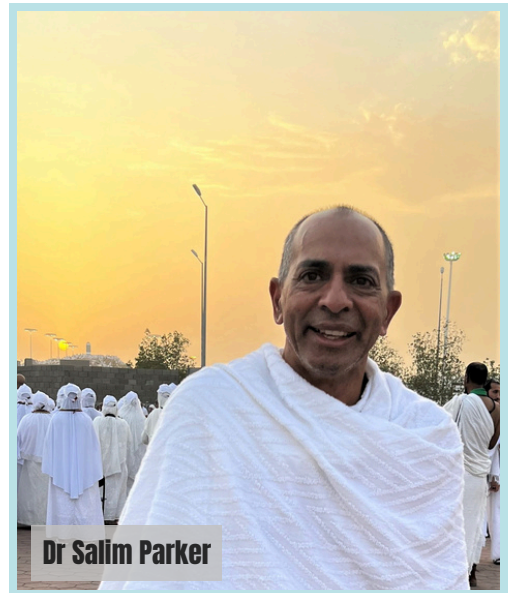
He was born and bred in West Africa. He was in his twenties, very healthy, very fit and single. He served in the army for a while and then moved to Dubai for employment purposes. He did quite well as a personal trainer at a gymnasium. 'I had many clients of very diverse nationalities. Their ages varied, some were old, some young. Some had a medical scare like a mild heart attack and for the first time in their lives wanted to start to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Others merely wanted to maintain their current level of fitness, for some it was a way of socializing, and some were intent on building muscle mass. I met a number of people and made some very good contacts. I would get good references so, Alhamdulillah, I was living a good life,' he said with a very, very big smile on his face.

'So, you decided to come for Hajj?' I asked. 'No! I did not have enough money and in fact never thought about Hajj at all except as a long-term obligation,' he replied. 'But you are here with us, in Ihram, on Arafat,' someone in our circle interjected. "'Allah is great!' he replied mischievously, adding to the suspense. He got up and I could see that he was walking with considerable discomfort due to the groin rash. 'I have some medication for that rash of yours,' I said. I got hold of my bag, took out some cream and handed it over to him. 'So how come you are here?' our fellow pilgrim asked again. 'I'll be back now, I just want to apply the cream,' he grinned. He left the tent leaving all of us wondering what transpired for him to be on Arafat.

He returned a few minutes later. 'You are so blessed,' I said. 'I truly am!' he replied and sat down with a smile broader than the distance from Dubai to Arafat. I thought of the long waiting period that people endure from the time that they make their Niyah till they actually leave their home country. South Africans wait for up to ten years, Indonesians wait for thirty years, and in one part of the world the waiting period is more than one hundred years. We know that there are nearly two billion Muslims on this earth and the majority would never be able to fulfil the fifth pillar of Islam. I reflected on how privileged we were to be of the chosen and blessed miniscule percentage who were destined to stretch out our hand towards the sky during the time of Wuqoof. 'Allah loves all of you,' a friend from back home had earlier messaged me.



He could not wait to board the bus taking us to Mina for the first day of Hajj.



Dr Salim Parker

'I am in Ihram. I really want to know how he got to be on Hajj, and the slow unfolding of his story is really excruciating! Maybe this my true test on Arafat, to be patient and wait for the unveiling,' our fellow pilgrim joked. The personal trainer continued his story. One of his clients was an enthusiastic young Saudi citizen. He spent many sessions training him and the youngster took a liking to him and encouraged others to also join the fitness club. One day he met the father of the youngster, and they had a conversation about a few general topics. The father happened to be a high-ranking member in the Saudi embassy based in Dubai. Soon the talk turned to Saudi Arabia, about visiting the Holy Lands, and about the obligation of every Muslim to perform Hajj. His already bright eyes literally sparkled even more when the journey was mentioned.

'The official asked me if I have performed Hajj already to which I replied in the negative. He then asked me if I wished to go on the journey, to which I of course replied in the affirmative. I did not think much of it at that time, and we exchanged some details. A while later I received a phone call. It was from his secretary advising me to come to his office with my official documents,' our fitness instructor related. He duly went. 'We need to sort out your travel package,' the secretary informed him. His travel dates were given to him, his ticket and accommodation speedily organized. Time passed like a blur, as he had to hastily prepare for the ultimate journey in the life of any Muslim. One thing he was certain of; he was going to make the most of the journey that had been unexpectedly gifted onto him.

We spent most of the rest of the afternoon in supplication, sometimes on our own, sometimes as one united Ummah. Only Allah knew what transgressions each of us asked forgiveness for, and what we wished for ourselves and the rest of the world for. He was happy to be there, sad that his family was not with him, elated that he had new friends sharing the moments with him, and tearful as all of us were overcome by the occasion. Labaik! We were all truly standing on the plains of Arafat.

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