

HAJJ STORIES

FOR GOD AND MAN

FEBRUARY 2024

'I have to pay my debt, fulfil my obligation,' Ahmed (not his real name) said. He had a serious, goal-directed and result-orientated demeanor. He rarely smiled but did have a very helpful personality. He consulted me for a medical condition in Madinah, the City of Peace and Tranquility. Hajj was still more than a month away. He was my last patient for the morning session and the midday prayers were approaching. He gave me a very precise rundown of his conditions and had a printed copy of his condition and medications. I tried to speak of the serenity of Madinah and how it positively influenced health, but he brushed it off. He spoke very mechanically and mentioned that he had ten minutes to prepare himself before walking another ten minutes to the Prophet's Mosque. I told him that I was also going to get ready, and we agreed to meet in our hotel's foyer and together go to the mosque.

'Not only are you fulfilling your Hajj obligation, you are also now on a journey of self-discovery'

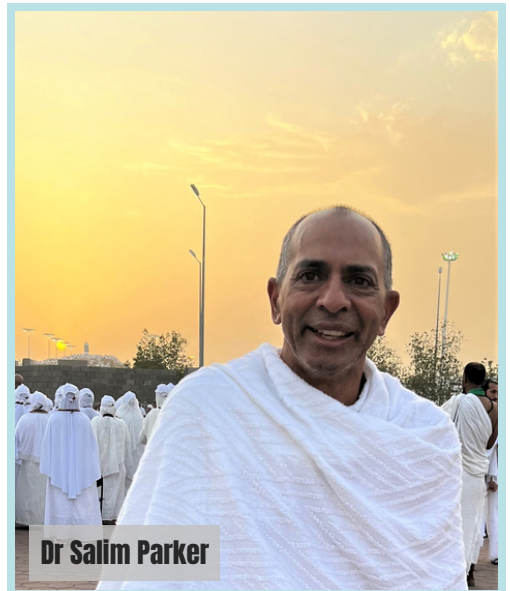
We met as planned and a Sheigh, who was also present there, walked with us. 'The Haram is opening its embracing arms wider and wider and welcoming all of us to enter,' the Sheigh said. 'Prayers in this Mosque has more reward than any other mosque except the one in Makkah, we must make the most of it' Ahmed said and hurried his steps. The midday sun reflected off the green dome that signaled the burial site of our beloved Prophet (SAW). 'It seems like a magical magnet that draws each believer closer and closer to the spiritual parts of our religion,' the Sheigh said. 'I have so many people who asked me to convey greetings to Mohammed (SAW),' Ahmed said. He pulled a little book out of his bag and indicated that he had a few pages of names to still complete. 'I have an obligation to fulfil my promise,' he said.

After the prayers were finished, he indicated that we should hurry back for lunch before it gets really busy in the restaurant. The last prayer was the prayer for three people who passed away. As we exited the Mosque, the biers of the departed passed us. 'Shall we accompany them to Janatul Baquee, the burial grounds of the Sahabah?' the Sheigh asked. I do not normally have lunch and indicated my willingness to go with him. Ahmed was clearly hesitant. 'There is reward in joining the procession. We can also greet some of the Companions of our beloved Prophet (SAW) whilst we are there. There is no obligation to go but the reward is substantial,' the Sheigh added. I do not know what was going through his mind, whether he was calculating the benefits of accompanying us with the disadvantages of having a late or no pre-paid lunch. He came with us.

We collectively made Duaa for the deceased and witnessed one of the bodies being lowered into the grave. We spoke of those Allah blessed with a final resting place in Madinah. 'I would want to finish performing my Hajj rather than passing away in Madinah now and be buried here. Hajj is the ultimate obligation, the fifth pillar of Islam. I have the money and health and it is incumbent on me to complete it. I hope nothing happens to me till then' Ahmed said. 'Insha-Allah nothing will happen to you. But even if some calamity strikes, bear in mind that you made your intention for Hajj. If someone passes away after making that Niyah, Allah will accept their Hajj. Whether tragedy strikes when leaving their house, on any of the transport modes utilized, in Madinah or Makkah, on the first day of hajj on Mina or on the Day on the way to Arafat, our Creator would consider the final pillar as being completed,' the Sheigh replied.

We greeted some of the Sahabah and started making our way to our hotel. My next clinic was to start in about thirty minutes. 'They would have stopped serving lunch by now,' Ahmed dryly remarked. 'I'll buy you something to eat,' I offered, but he politely declined. Lunch was part of the package that he paid for. He was rather quiet most of the time and I asked him if anything was wrong. 'I did not realise that I was so fixated in my ways. I came on this journey because I must and was going to do whatever is prescribed. I treated it as a mortgage that must be repaid. Do not get me wrong, I never considered it a grudge purchase, but I never asked myself if I wanted to,' he said. 'Fulfil your obligation towards your Creator, and simultaneously fill your spiritual and emotional vessel,' the Sheigh replied.

I did not see him again until we reached Makkah when I came across him and his wife on the roof of the Haram just before the final evening prayer. 'We still have a group Tawaaf in about two hours' time,' he said. It meant that they had to finish the evening prayers, make their way through the immense crowds to the hotel, have a quick bite, and then join the group on the journey back to the Haram. 'What is Doc going to do?' his wife asked me. I explained that I normally perform a Tawaaf on the roof immediately after the prayers and then return to the hotel thereafter as the crowds would have thinned out considerably. I would then have supper and see to the inevitable medical emergencies. We could see

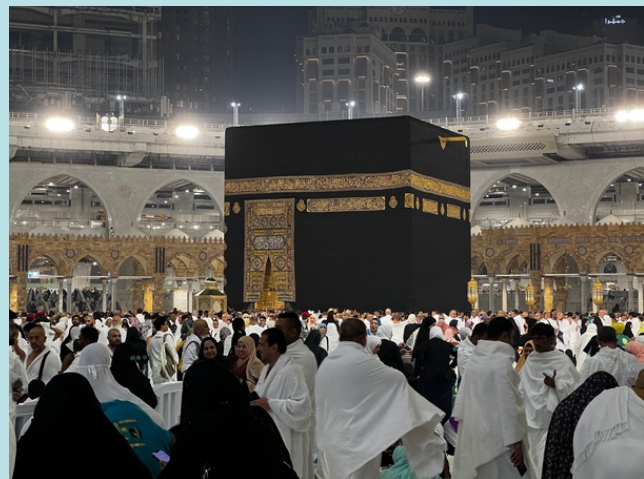


Dr Salim Parker

the Kab'aa from where we were standing and were mesmerized by the continuous circumambulation by the swirling mass of humanity.

'I can just stay here for hours and hours,' his wife said. Both were completely entranced by the surreal harmonious celebration of Islam's diversity. It was very full, but always a space for an extra pilgrim whether from Alaska or Indonesia. The evening warmth gently embraced us all, imperceptibly brushing out all agitation and infusing tranquility. 'Let us stay after Eshai,' he suddenly said to his wife. 'We can make a Tawaaf right here on the roof at our own pace and following only each other.' He suddenly realised that I was still sitting with them and sheepishly asked whether I would join them. I politely declined, indicating that I had some commitments after my Tawaaf. 'I notice that not only are you fulfilling your Hajj obligation, you are also now on a journey of self-discovery,' I smiled.

I saw him on Arafat two weeks later. He was a pilgrim, a curious explorer, a husband, a brother to many, and an extra pair of hands when needed. Yet he resembled all other Hujjaaj. I was fascinated watching this massive uniform gathering of humanity from every corner of the globe. Even more fascinating was the merging of all the individual components of ourselves into one soul reaching out and beseeching our Creator. AllahuAkbar!



Hajj opens up new dimensions of our inner self