

# HAJJ STORIES

## NEVER SECOND BEST

JANUARY 2024

'I am the aunt who will bake a birthday cake when the one ordered from the specialty cake shop is delayed,' she laughed. There was not a hint of bitterness in her voice. 'If there is no one to look after small children when the parents have to go out, well then, I am good enough to take care of them as a last resort. There are times when I am invited to a party as someone pulled out at the last minute and the numbers need be filled. Those are the privileges I have as a single lady who has a large extended family and who is approaching middle age. You know Doc, I am never the first or second person that comes to mind for anything. I am the backup for everything. However, all the family would admit my cakes are edible and no kid ever goes hungry or gets hurt when under my care!' she added.

She was chatting to me in my consulting room in Makkah. Hajj was still about two weeks away. She was normally a healthy lady, physically active and well dressed and very well mannered. She looked fifteen years younger than her actual age and I remarked that maintaining physical and mental health adds years to a predicted lifespan and slices away the normal appearance of aging. She presented with a cold and this is normally easily treated. I dispensed some medication and advised some rest. 'I attended one of your talks back home and you recommended plenty of rest before the huge demands of the five days of Hajj overwhelm us,' she said. 'I feel slightly weak now but would still like to go to the Haram for the five daily prayers,' she virtually pleaded. Deep inside I was smiling and knew exactly what thoughts she was harbouring. I have been there so many times previously!

'I want to spend every moment constructively,' she said. I am not even supposed to be here! I lost all my money that I saved for Hajj some years ago when I lost out as usual in a relationship.' She explained that she was supposed to have been married about fifteen years previously, but her fiancé kept postponing. Postponing until he found someone 'better,' someone with more money, someone with a

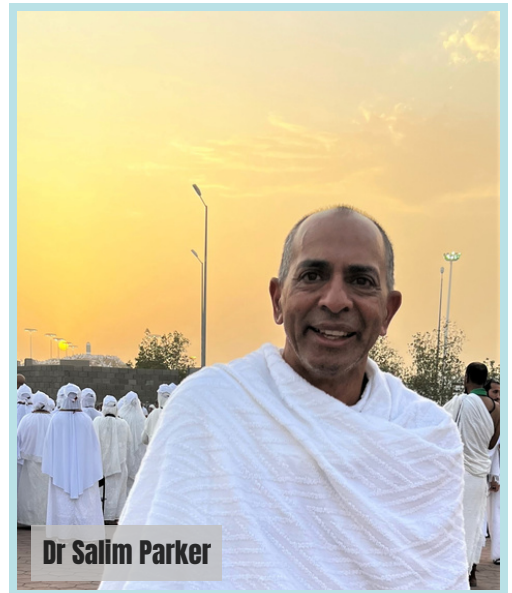
job that paid much, much more. 'The money that we saved together for a deposit on a house and our Hajj was suddenly gone when he declared that our relationship was over and he was marrying someone else. My Hajj money, money that I painstakingly put away, was gone. I was advised that using lawyers would cost more than the money I may have recouped so I did not pursue it,' she added.

She then raised a familiar issue that we often encounter. She looked after her elderly mother for more than twenty years. Her three brothers, all professionals, had minimal contact with their mother and never contributed financially to her household. Even when the mother became frail and major renovations had to be made to the bedroom and bathroom to maximise her comfort, they refused to contribute, claiming financial distress. She paid for all these and all other expenses such as electricity, food and rates. 'I would do it again and again,' she said. It was clear that a deep bond existed between her and the mother. The house was on the mother's name and shortly before her death she expressed to some family members that her daughter should inherit the house as at least sixty percent of the value was due to the alterations that she paid for. This was witnessed by at least one religious scholar, but it was never formally contracted.

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After Allah recalled her mother, her siblings became extremely religion conscious. Not so much about looking after their single sister but very much about Islamic wills. Even though the scholar tried to intervene and advised that the sister's expenses should first be seen to before the estate was wound up, the brothers decided to stick to the letter of the law. In South African law their mother did not leave a last written will, so that was adopted by them as her last one stated that all proceedings should be

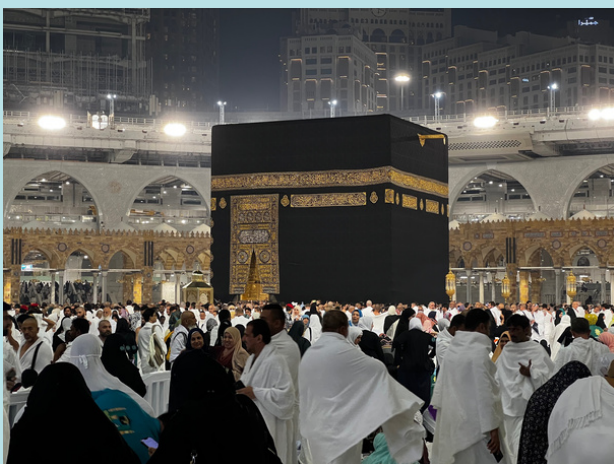
according to Islamic law. The strict definition of the percentages being shared after all debts were settled was conveniently ignored. The mother's house was sold and the sister had to find accommodation with the small percentage of the proceeds that was becoming to her. Her life was in financial and economic ruin. Even her car, which she bought from her mother but remained registered on the latter's name, went into the estate.



'I applied for Hajj a few years previously Doc. A few months after my mother passed away last year, the accreditation list was released. I could barely pay for my daily bread and was in absolutely no financial position to pay for the expensive Hajj trip. With my salary and current expenses, I worked out that it would take close to ten years for me to save enough money for the trip. I went to the local Hajj office to inform them that I was going to have to postpone my trip and explained the reason. There were a number of other people in the office at that time but I am sure I was not speaking loudly so it is unlikely that I was overheard. Doc, everything just changed after that. Somehow Allah heard my Duaas, somehow my desire to stand on Arafat was answered,' she said.

'I do not understand,' I replied, rather perplexed. 'I was no more second best, I was no more the last in line.' The words were now emotionally charged and at a speed and manner of cyclonic gusts. She started sobbing and it took a while for her to regain her composure. 'You are here on Hajj so clearly it was something very, very positive,' I smiled. 'I got a phone call to say that my Hajj is sorted. Everything. My flights, my package, even some spending money. When I spoke to my employer about how much leave I could take, I was even more astounded. I did not have much leave due to me as I took off frequently during my mom's illness. My boss, who is not Muslim, told me to take off as long as I like with full pay. He knew what Hajj meant to me and even though he was not always a friendly person, his generosity shone through when I needed it most.'

We resolved her medical issues and she offered to pay for my services, which I respectfully declined. A few days later I was chatting to the agent she booked with and somehow we started to talk about her. 'What an amazing person,' the agent said. 'The benefactor offered to fully pay for one of the higher priced packages which she declined. She insisted on taking the cheapest package for the time that she was to travel and also did not take the longest package as she wanted to not inconvenience her employer who is very reliant on her. She did not spend a single cent of her spending money on herself as she only spends on those in need. She never complains and always has a smile and kind words,' he told me.



Everyone comes first in front of the house of Allah