

# HAJJ STORIES

## MERIT OF CREDIT

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“Balance is what is needed Doc,” the Sheikh said. We were chatting a few days before Hajj was due to start in Azizyah, a suburb of Makkah. We had just witnessed the police raiding a building and arresting some Umrah pilgrims who overstayed their Ramadan visit with the intention of performing Hajj as well. Previous years many unregistered pilgrims managed to reach Arafat donned in Ihram, uniting with millions of others. No one knew whether the person standing next to them on Jabal Rahmah, supplicating to our Creator and beseeching forgiveness for transgressions, did not in fact transgress the Hajj visa rules. The rules are there for the safety of pilgrims and for the efficient delivery of services during the five days of Hajj when millions obey Divine instructions to carry out rituals in a relatively set sequence within confined spaces. We had witnessed stampede tragedies previously when the extreme number of pilgrims complicated crowd control.

***‘I am not going to ask the person standing next to me if he is an accredited pilgrim or not.’***

‘And announce the pilgrimage to mankind—they will come to you on foot and on every lean mount; they will come from every distant pathway,’ the Sheikh quoted the Holy Quran. ‘Then bear in mind that Hajj is a once in a life obligation, a debt owing to Allah, by all who can afford it and have the health to take part in the journey,’ he added. We started crunching the numbers. We have nearly two billion Muslims on this earth. We roughly estimated that if no additional person is born and no one passes away, and assuming ten million perform Hajj every year, it would take two hundred years for each and every one to perform Hajj only once in their lifetime. I informed him that with current rules in place, where countries get a quota annually depending on how many Muslims are resident there, the average South African would wait about twenty years to perform Hajj after registering.

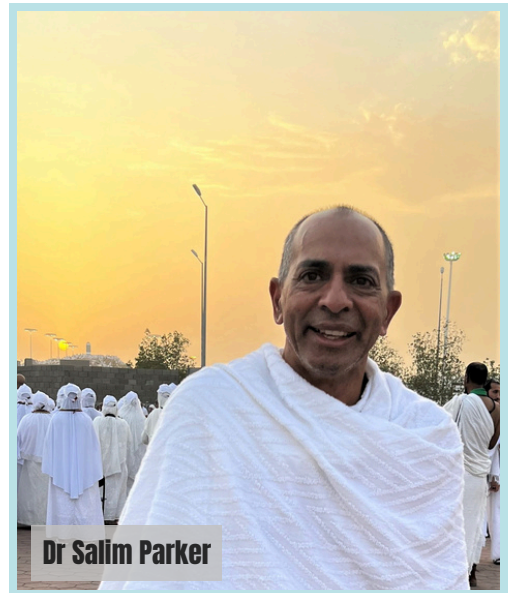
‘It is worse for Indonesians as their waiting period is about thirty years, and one part of Malaysia currently will have to wait over one hundred years before they become eligible! Imagine the frustration and desperation those people have to endure,’ I said. ‘It is again a question of balance,’ the Sheikh said. Balance the desperate need and desire of those who want to perform Hajj with the rules existing in the country hosting it. On the one hand a controlled crowd allows all pilgrims ease, and they can maximise their time during Hajj in Duaa instead of being overcrowded in tents with temperatures exceeding tolerable levels. Disasters can be avoided, and the physical movements can be facilitated with fewer interruptions. On the other hand, we have desperate people who feel that they are being deprived of a once in a lifetime journey,’ the Sheikh continued.

We both knew of many instances where our hearts were really touched by the particular circumstances. We both knew of a gentleman whose terminal cancer was diagnosed a particular year, about two months before the Hajj season. His accreditation was most likely only going to be the following year, by when he would probably have been recalled by our Creator. Many tried to intervene and permit him to go earlier but to no avail. He had saved a long time for this journey and only registered once he was assured he had the necessary funds. This is contrary to others who put their names up for registration without a clue where the money is going to come from. ‘Allah shall provide,’ one person said. When the accreditation came about seven years later, fundraising events had to be held in order to raise the necessary funds. ‘I find that problematic, just as I find certain countries having a lottery to draw the names of that year’s pilgrims,’ the Sheikh said.

We listened to an intense debate between a few scholars on the issue of the non-accredited pilgrims who somehow made their way into Makkah. Some felt strongly that the law of the country is paramount, and it should be obeyed. They noted that massive investments were being made by the host country into the required infrastructure with a certain maximum number of Hajj pilgrims in mind, which is ten million by the year 2030. It is impossible to accurately ascertain how many unaccredited actually also perform Hajj every year, but exceeding the planned-for numbers would cause logistical, capacity and provisions problems leading to potential discomfort, destabilisation and even potentially disasters to those accredited. Their rights would be infringed upon and this would take away any benefit from the unaccredited ones. ‘There is no debate here, the sovereignty of the affected state should not be debated if their intentions are noble,’ the one scholar stated.

Of course there were opposing views. One view was that the Quranic reference of: ‘they will come from every distant pathway,’ referred not only to the

physical path traversed but also to the difficulties that had to be surmounted. ‘Not everyone can travel like Musa Mansa did in 1324,’ the Sheikh said. He alluded to the Mali emperor who travelled with sixty thousand subjects and 12 thousand slaves with so much gold that the price of it plummeted when he reached Cairo on his way to Makkah. Many pilgrims in previous centuries had to cross enemy territories and very inhospitable terrains to reach the birthplace of our beloved Prophet (SAW) in order to answer the call made by Nabi Ibrahim thousands of years ago. There are many accounts of pilgrims of previous centuries leaving their villages to embark on the holiest



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of journeys fully aware that they may never return.

‘So, some see the number restrictions as a mere obstacle, one of the difficulties that may be encountered,’ the scholar concluded. ‘They feel that once they made their Niyah, their intention, known and set out on the journey, that Allah will accept it even if they die before they reach Makkah. They consider even laws of countries as mere obstacles, and their mindset is not easily changed,’ he added. However, this particular year the Sheikh and I were discussing how the issue was very different. There were many checkpoints, apartments were raided, fines were issued, and many faced deportation and even a five year ban from entering the country again. We asked a few of our friends in Makkah who we knew were not accredited about their plans.

Some had left for home already with Hajj a few days away, others already made plans to leave. A few were still around, not daring to even leave their apartments, with every knock on the door instilling the fear that it may be the feared police. ‘We are going to be on Arafat soon,’ the Sheikh said. ‘There we are all going to implore our Creator that we are beseeching his forgiveness and that we are all there purely by the will of Allah. I am not going to ask the person standing next to me if he is an accredited pilgrim or not. I am going to greet everyone who has donned his Ihram as my fellow brother or sister and ask Allah to forgive each and every one present. Ultimately Allah will decide and our Creator’s decision is final,’ he concluded. Nothing prepared us for what happened subsequently.



Hajj is Ihram on Arafat