

# HAJJ STORIES

## BONDS THAT BOND

MAY 2024

'We were never really close as older siblings,' he told me. We had just returned home from Hajj about a week earlier, but the spirituality experienced on Arafat and in the Haram was still palpable. The memory of Madina's tranquility was also interwoven in the tapestry of emotions that this journey of a lifetime blesses us with. We had a get-together of the group we travelled with and the new friendships and bonds that were formed whilst on the journey continued to blossom. It is often said that pilgrims set off as individuals and returns as a family. It is also noted that Hajj friends become friends for life. Strangers on departure, but confidants, soulmates, counsellors forever thereafter. Many books have been written about this and he was testimony to it as well. However, he was also referring to his two sisters and one brother who coincidentally all performed Hajj at the same time.

'We were a typical Cape Town brood,' he told me. 'We could not live without each other or with each other as kids. My brother was simultaneously my confidant and nemesis. We could melodiously recite the Quran together for a while and then yell at each other minutes later. My sisters were always supportive of me and the youngest sibling but always bossed me around. Rooms were shared and territorial boundaries demarcated, but these were never adhered to. Clothes were passed down not only amongst our siblings, but also close family members and we literally were one big extended family with cousins often considered to be siblings. Aunts and uncles and neighbours were considered as fellow parents. In fact, it was truly a whole village or district that raised one child,' he added. Then, with a grin that spanned the earth's circumference, he added: 'I would not have wanted it any other way.'



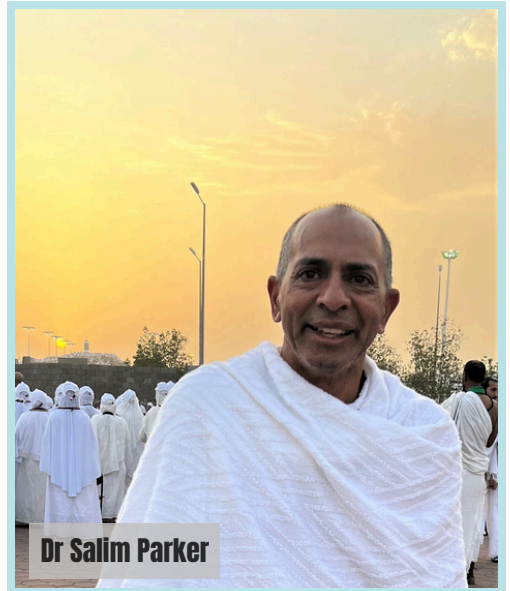
*On Arafat bonds blossom and are blessed*

Life however takes its own twists and turns. Sometimes we are willing participants, sometimes we are innocent bystanders, and sometimes we are just amazed at how fate does not pay an inch of attention to time. Of course they were all there for each other when each one got married, when their children were born, and when family events took place. They all had different professions, different aspirations, and different views of their future. They all moved away from their homely suburb and literally moved to the four corners of the Cape peninsula. Their work demands, the realities of raising children needing to be transported from school to sporting events and then to tutoring sessions meant that they had very little time for themselves, let alone for their siblings. 'You know Doc, as adults we never really had words, we just drifted apart,' he lamented.

### ***'We cried because we realised how much we were alike'***

There were times that they did not have contact with each other for weeks, and sometimes even months. They were there for each other when needed, but no one went out of their way to rekindle their old bonds. The only issue they seemed to consider collectively in their middle decades was Hajj. 'We four somehow decided to go on Hajj with our spouses more or less at the same time. Somehow Allah decreed that it would be in the same year. We did not really communicate much about our plans and two of us went with the same Hajj group whilst the others travelled separately. We all did our greetings on our own. We knew of one family where two sisters who were married and lived separate from their parents, actually left Cape Town from their parent's home with their spouses. They left as a family; we departed as individuals. We did not think much about it,' he told me.

'It was sheer coincidence that we departed from Cape Town to Madina within a day of each other. Our parents wanted us of course to convey their salaams to our Beloved Prophet (SAW). They did not explicitly say we should do it together but seemed to imply it in their messages. We siblings and our spouses, together with my mother, formed our own private Whatsapp chat and this mode of communication made it easy for all of us to plan our activities. Our first planned meeting in front of the qabr of our Prophet (SAW) did not materialize as the groups we were travelling with changed their plans. My father was not one for mobile communication but would, via our mother, send his suggestions. The seed was sown for us to rekindle the flame of our bond that was imperceptibly flickering and somehow was never extinguished,' he continued.



**Dr Salim Parker**

Alas, Madinah came and went, and they never could meet as four couples though there were some times where one or two ran into each other. They learnt more about each other and the ladies exchanged ideas on their phones about the best places in the Haram to pray in whilst their spouses advised each other about the best way to visit the Rhawdah, the part of paradise in the Prophet's Mosque. They left for Makkah on different days and, a few days after performing their Umrah, were informed that one of their parents took ill. 'Let's make a Tawaaf for our parents,' one of them messaged in the group. After a bit of to and fro about the best time, they agreed to meet at a specific time. 'It was like old times!' he laughed. The older sisters basically dictated the meeting place and their mother urged them to not let anything deter them.

'Doc, it was when we stood in front of the Ka'ba that we all started to cry. We cried because we realised how much we were alike, how much we still loved each other and how much more rewarding and fulfilling life could be. Our spouses were not a replacement, they were an addition and extension of our bonds. We could actually feel our parents smiling all those miles away as we performed a Tawaaf together. And another one the next day for our parents including those of our spouses. And the day thereafter for our children. We had at least one meal together daily. When we moved to Azizyah a week before Hajj started, we had a small prayer meeting daily. On Arafat we were in the same camp but different group tents but made sure that we made a collective family Duaa. We were truly there as one big family who could proudly all say Labaai! We were there together in the presence of our Creator,' he said with tears in his eyes.

I listened intently and then we were joined by some fellow newfound Hajj family. After about thirty minutes of mingling with others he came to greet me. 'Why are you leaving so early? The food will be served soon' I said. 'I would have loved to stay but it is the birthday of my sister's child. There is no way I am going to miss that!' he replied. 'You're just going there to eat sweet stuff,' I joked. 'True, the nectar of my family bond is now definitely impossible to resist. Previously I considered it a mere chore. Now it is to reminisce about our childhood, our current life and especially about our Hajj that reunited this family.' Allahu Akbar!