

# HAJJ STORIES

## STOPPING HELP

NOVEMBER 2024

It was hot and humid in Musdalifah, and the numbers arriving there in the evening were increasing exponentially. Disheveled appeared those who walked from Arafat after sunset on the day of Wuqoof. Exhausted and sweating profusely, many needed to rest before combining the sunset and evening prayers and thereafter collecting pebbles. All had the profound and overwhelming sense of gratitude that we were indeed blessed to be the guests of our Creator. Many decided not to walk from Arafat and instead opted for bus transportation. It was one of the hottest days ever documented on Arafat and over one thousand three hundred heat related fatalities were documented. There is of course also no compulsion to walk. The example of our Beloved Prophet (SAW) is instructive as he was mounted on a camel whilst travelling between the Hajj ritual sites. Walking was also not an option for our elders and those with medical conditions.

***‘Yes, we were clearly delusional to think that everything would logically go according to plan.’***

The group I was travelling with were all going to take the bus from Arafat to Musdalifah. We have been bonding as brothers and sisters over the last few days. Amongst us were elderly and single travellers with medical conditions and we did not want to abandon them. It was an air-conditioned, top of the range and brand-new vehicle, equipped with all possible modern amenities. It felt like being inside a five-star hotel compared to the still very oppressively hot and humid evening air outside. It was a long and tiring day, and many were still suffering from the physical toll of the performed rituals. Some were soon snoring in their seats, whilst others were exclaiming ‘Labaik!’ This was their affirmation to their Creator that they were indeed present performing their Hajj. We would all chant it until we have pelted the largest of the Jamarats the next day. But that was still some time away.

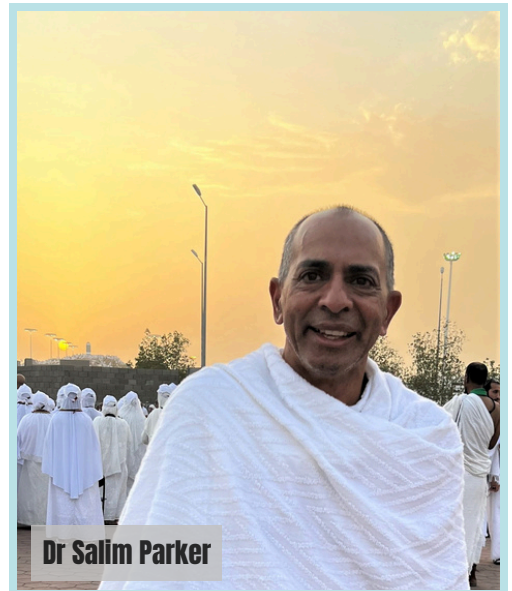
However, if a person is sick, no luxury can induce a feeling of wellbeing. She sat at the back of the bus with her husband and three young children. I was informed later that she had vomited just before boarding the bus and immediately went to sleep. It took more than an hour for our bus to start moving from Arafat, and two hours later we were still stuck in gridlocked traffic. Most of us were comfortable with enough water and food though admittedly our patience was getting stretched. I felt distinctly uncomfortable as for twenty years I walked the route and missed the atmosphere that is unique in time, place and spirit. After about three hours her condition deteriorated. She was not part of our group so when her husband asked a fellow pilgrim if there

was a hospital nearby, he was asked to speak to me. In impeccable English he asked me if I could assist.

She was sick, and apparently vomiting into a plastic bag right at the back of the bus in a corner, shielded by her family. ‘She needs admission to a hospital,’ I said. A very cursory examination revealed a dehydrated lady with a very high fever. Her pulse was rapid and very weak, and she could not even stand unaided. I gave her some potent tablets to stop her vomiting but even this did not stay down. ‘We need to put up a drip to give her some fluids,’ I said. I had a rough idea of where we were and knew that there was a Saudi medical clinic not far away. I asked some of my fellow pilgrims to let me know when they see it. The plan was that we would stop the bus very close to the clinic so that she and her family could get off and she could be helped. We saw the clinic. Alas, it was not easy to get off the bus.

‘I am not allowed to stop here!’ the driver screamed. We were driving very, very slowly and I tried to persuade him of the urgency of the matter. He followed up with a choicer set of words. There were police everywhere and as soon as any vehicle slowed down to slower than a snail’s pace, they violently threatened them with arrest and, in our evidently foreign driver’s case, deportation. There was a language barrier between myself, the bus driver and the police and we were wasting time. Our patient was getting weaker as we drove away from the clinic. After about a kilometer all traffic came to a grinding halt. One of my trilingual friends opened the bus door and grabbed my hand. ‘Come,’ he said.

He spoke eloquently to the nearest policeman and explained the state of our patient. I dragged him onto the bus, and he witnessed firsthand her dire state. ‘The next clinic is about one kilometer ahead,’ he said. No, he could not permit our bus to pass the others as there was no room to maneuver. No, he could not stay on our bus until we reached the clinic as he was stationed at a fixed point. Yes, he could write on a piece of paper that our bus needed to stop at the clinic due to a medical emergency. Yes, of course the cop the would read his note and, understanding the gravity of the situation, would permit the bus to stop and the patient to disembark and to be attended to immediately. No, there would absolutely be no problem. Yes, we were clearly delusional to think that everything would logically go according to plan.



Dr Salim Parker

It took about twenty minutes for us to reach the next clinic on Musdalifah. It was the perfect place for her to be as she would be seen to medically and still be performing her Hajj rites as prescribed by being present there. The police there however refused the bus to stop and no matter how the driver, and my friend tried to explain to them what was happening, their job was to keep the traffic moving. We moved, in fact we moved past Musdalifah and drove all the way into Mina before being shunted onto another road back towards Musdalifah. By now I have doubled her dose of medication and she was taking some sips of water. We reached a bridge on Musdalifah with police stationed at either end. But not on the bridge itself. I knew there was a clinic very close by, literally at the one end.

‘Let’s get off here,’ my friend said, and we scurried off with her and her family. Somehow a wheelchair appeared, and she was seated in it. We walked with them to the clinic and explained to him that they would be safe. As a precaution we scribbled our contact details on a piece of paper and advised that he could call any of us if needed. From previous experience I knew the family would be fine as they had their group’s details and locations on all of them. They thanked us profusely and entered the facility. Some of us set off to find a spot to perform our combined prayers and collect pebbles. ‘Hey Doc, they lost our contact details.’ My friend said, showing me the piece of paper with our contact details. ‘They’ll be fine,’ I replied. Labaik!



Traffic on Musdalifah moves at a snail's pace but busses are not allowed to stop