

HAJJ STORIES

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

OCTOBER 2024

'If I was told two months ago that I would be performing Hajj this year I would have laughed at the suggestion,' he said. 'Of course, we all think of it, that we have to repay our debt to Allah some time in our lives and honour our obligation to fulfil the fifth pillar of Islam. I was running my business and very involved with building my life which revolved around my wife, two small children and my family in London,' he added. He hailed from Egypt but was now settled in England. We were sitting in our tent in Mina on the first day of Hajj and I was amazed at the diversity of our group as, of the seven seated in a circle chatting to each other, no two came from the same country. 'Now I am getting ready for the most important day of my life tomorrow when we all will be on Arafat,' he glowed.

'I am content, but I do wish my wife was with,'

Of course, we all wanted to hear his story! He just had the most unbelievably broad smile that seemed to traverse oceans aplenty, and was constantly engaging in Thikr, praising his Creator and remembering his beloved Prophet (SAW). 'It is all due to my wife,' he tried to explain. One of the fellow pilgrims expressed surprise, as we were aware that our Londoner travelled with his sister. 'Yes, my sister is travelling with me, but it is due to my wife that we had the great fortune to be here. You see, my wife works for a company that is Saudi based,' he said. We all joked that we failed to see what he meant. He indicated that his wife has never performed Hajj yet, yet somehow was able to facilitate his and his sister's journey. 'How come your wife is not with you?' someone asked. 'It is a bit complicated,' he replied.



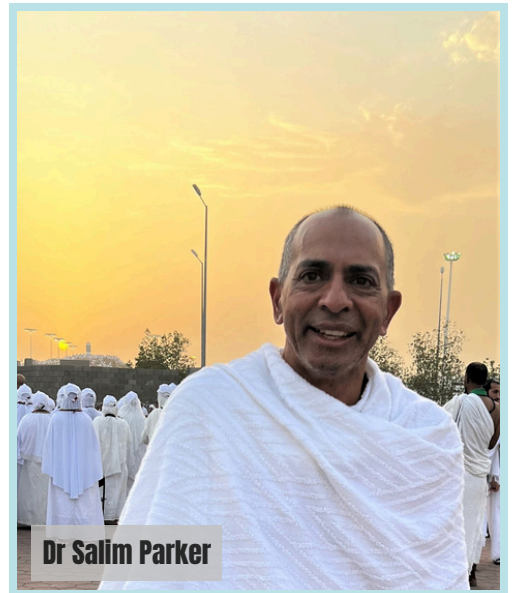
Performing Hajj alone is an honour. Having your spouse with makes it so much more meaningful.

He explained that she was a valued staff member of the company. She was offered, out of the blue, the opportunity to perform Hajj and take someone along. It was not free, as all they were offered was the option to buy the Hajj package and this was to be accompanied by the priceless Hajj visa. 'Everything had to be done online,' he said. I recalled being in exactly the same position. Whilst trying to enter information onto the dedicated website, the site would sometimes freeze and then you have to start all over again. In fact, once a person chose a package in a certain price range, the system would stall again. When I managed to enter again a few minutes later, the only available packages were much, much more expensive. There were other unexpected obstacles as well before a transaction could be paid.

Only credit card payments could be used, and most people had a credit limit that was woefully inadequate to pay the exorbitant Hajj prices. It meant that money first had to be deposited into the credit card from other accounts so that the total in there would be sufficient. This process sometimes took a few hours or even a day or two, and at times the more affordable packages would have been sold out by the time that there were sufficient funds. The whole process would then have to be repeated. However, we were all undeterred and somehow managed to complete the tedious but necessary processes. Once payment was effected, the rest of the booking system was relatively easy. It was the unease of dealing with a computer system and not a guiding and sympathetic human being that tended to be unnerving.

'We have two small children,' he continued. 'We would ideally have left them in the care of my sister. My wife however works for an international company and arranging leave and ensuring adequate cover during her time away was going to be problematic. She was still excited for me to go and we decided that my sister would join me,' he added. I was struck by the irony. The person who initiated and facilitated the journey ends up ultimately not embarking on the most important journey in the life of any Muslim. She stayed in London taking care of the children. 'Here I am, getting ready for Arafat,' he smiled. We were all truly blessed as we recited and chatted. It was one of the hottest of the more than twenty Hajj journeys that I had undertaken, yet our camp was relatively empty and we had all of our air conditioners working optimally.

He was optimistically planning to accompany his wife on this journey in the future. Hopefully she would be gifted visas again by her company and they would then be able to travel together.



Dr Salim Parker

'It is cold in here,' one of our brothers from West Africa complained, and moved away from the cooler that was blowing in his direction. We had been served some delicious meals and had more than enough beverages available at all times. 'It is going to be hot tomorrow,' I replied. The stark reality of that conversation would only hit us a few days later when we realised that more than one thousand three hundred succumbed to heat related illnesses. We were blissfully living in luxury whilst others were soon to be exposed to some of the harshest elements ever documented, to be exposed to the scorching sun with no respite available to them.

The next day was the most important day in the lives of the nearly two million who were present on Arafat. Many present in my tent were travelling as single men and were chatting about when they would be honoured to accompany their spouses. It was evident that couples standing at the time of Wuqoof were sharing a unique bond that was being strengthened by their Duaas. These prayers could have been for their children, their parents, the rest of their lives together, or merely reaching out to their Creator. Hajj is an obligation, and merely being present on Arafat partly fulfils part of the debt owed to Allah. Sharing those moments with your soulmate, the one who probably knows you more intimately than anyone else and has shared many trials and triumphs with you can make it so much more relevant. Many had their lives altered for the better by these precious shared moments.

His sister was in the ladies' tent and had made a set of friends that she was very comfortable spending most of her time with. He was part of our circle of initial solo travellers who by now were each other's brothers. We prayed together, feasted together, cried together and left the vast plains of Arafat together. After reaching Musdalifah around midnight, we combined our Maghrib and Eshai prayers and collected stones to pelt the Jamarat the next morning. 'Hajj is Arafat, but Musdalifah really brings us down to earth,' I remarked. We had truly great comfort on Arafat, whilst here we only had our prayer mats and our backpacks and had to make our own way to Mina. 'I am content, but I do wish my wife was with,' he remarked. As I sat there, I made a Duaa that his wish would soon be answered. 'I am content, but I do wish my wife was with,'