

# HAJJ STORIES

## 'I AM HERE'

SEPTEMBER 2024



*Always there, always making time,  
always making Duaa*

'I am here,' he said. 'Do not worry, please open the front door,' he gently comforted me a year ago. I must admit that I was worried. Sheigh had to make the Duaa on my departure for Hajj, as he made for close to twenty years. As always, when I informed him that I had a Hajj visa, he merely asked me the day and time of my departure and assured me that he would bestow the honour of his presence at that time. I panicked when he was not present with five minutes to go as Sheigh was beyond punctual; he was always early. When I called him on his mobile number there was no response, which was also very unusual. My relief was immeasurable when I saw him approaching the door, and we warmly greeted each other. I could not foresee ever leaving for the Blessed Land without his esteemed presence.

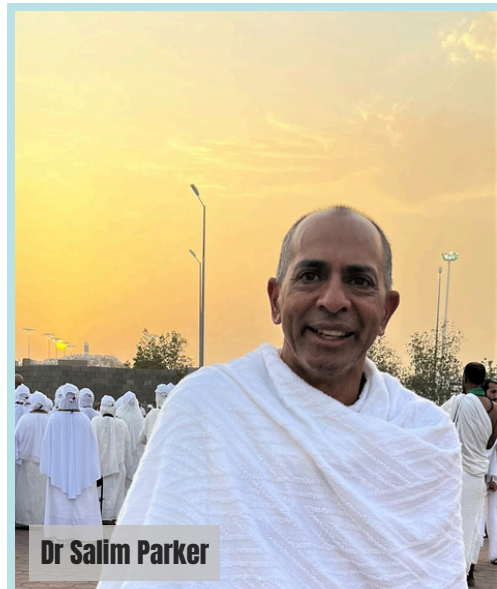
'Apologies Doc,' he started saying, and I immediately stopped him. How can one of the most revered scholars and community leaders apologise to me! However, he persisted and explained that he was counselling someone contemplating suicide whilst he was sitting outside in his car. He took me aside and spoke to me for a mere few minutes. However, because he had the uncanny ability to ensure that he spoke to one person and one person only with complete attention and no distraction, it felt that we had spent days together. By the time he finished his sage Hajj advice to me, he still had 'more than sufficient time to interact with those present, have a cup of tea, and crack a joke. He was acutely aware of time yet seemed at ease to manipulate it so that the frantic fervour of commitments seemed like feathers floating along on gentle whispers.

He was always there. There to perform Nikahs, there to name a newborn and there to lower those that Allah had recalled to their abode six feet below the earth's surface. He was a unique blend of a scholar, teacher, community person, leader, listener, Imam of a mosque, family man and human being. One of his greatest skills was to teach and instill the love of the memorization of the Holy Quran. Many others learnt to appreciate his teaching of how to recite correctly. I know of cardiologists who took his teachings to heart, and many other medical specialists who fondly recall being under his Islamic tutelage. He embraced a cleaner hungry for knowledge with the same respect and warmth as professionals and students quenching their thirst for education. Everyone he came into contact with cherishes special unique moments they shared only and solely with him and him alone.

### ***'Make time for people, and time will make more time'***

'Answer the phone now,' he once gently commanded me. We were chatting in his office about a Hajj issue when my phone rang, and the screen displayed my mother's name. I was about to switch off the phone, intending to return the call once I finished my meeting when he instructed me. 'I can wait, I am here, never let your mother wait,' were his sage words. I learnt later that he visited his mother, who did not live with him, virtually every day. She was more than ninety when Allah recalled her. 'Make time for people, and time will make more time,' were his words. These words echoed on Arafat. He was one of the guiding lights for Hujjaaj whilst he was studying in Makkah in his younger days. 'No matter how busy you are, there will always be time for you on Arafat to connect with our Creator,' were his prophetic words one year when I was privileged to stand next to him at the time of Wuqoof, just after having attended to a number of sick pilgrims.

One year, in Madinah, a friend bemoaned the fact that he could not set foot in Rhodatul Jannah, the piece of paradise in the Mosque of our Prophet (SAW). He tried for about ten days and was due to leave for Makkah the next day. Sheigh overheard this. 'Let us make time after Asr and, Insha-Allah, we'll enter. Meet me at the front of the hotel at a particular time, and be assured, I'll be there,' he said. Of course I grabbed the opportunity to also accompany them. 'Be patient, we have enough time,' Sheigh assured us. The crowds were immense, but we literally just walked in. There was no sweet talking of officials, no pushing and shoving of fellow pilgrims. We followed a leader who was assured of what, how to, and when to do the necessary. 'Take your time but remember that there are others who are as desperate as you to



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also have their time in Jannah on this earth,' he reminded us.

I have met many illustrious scholars. What set the truly remarkable ones apart is their ability to contextualise any issue and use their wisdom to advise. They use their vast knowledge, their ability to synthesise any new situation, and more importantly common sense, to guide those facing complexities. I could contact him with any Hajj query, whether pre-departure or standing on Arafat and his response would be precise, scholarly, logical and practical. Whether it was a male with incontinence needing to use pants under his Ihram, or a menstruating lady still needing to perform her mandatory Tawaaf whose flight was to depart in a few hours, his advice was always crystal clear.

This last Hajj was different. He was in hospital when I was to leave. When one of his former students departed for his Fard Hajj, he made the Duaa via a video call. This was the same student who, when the student's father passed away, Sheigh reassured him that he must consider him now as his own father. 'You know I am always there for you, contact me any time,' he said when I went to greet him. He made the usual Dua for me, and I left my home for the Holy Lands for the first time in more than twenty years without feeling his warm and reassuring embrace. 'Remember me when you are on Arafat,' he had requested. How could I not! I contacted frequently for vexing cases before, and on the Day of Wuqoof, and he was in my and many others' Duaas when we reached out to our Creator.

His physical health deteriorated but his mental sharpness and his love for the Quaran was constant. Friends, family, students and well-wishers recited when they visited. Many top health experts were frequently at his bedside, all aware of the inevitability of our recall by our Creator. When he finally drew in his last breath, those around him were reciting some of his beloved words. Many were there for him, just as he was for them.

I reflected to a few months previously, to my standing on Arafat. 'Labai!' we all said. 'I am here, we are here.' I texted him just before midday about a Hajj legal issue to which he responded within minutes. This colossus of a scholar, Hafith, teacher, adviser, Imam, leader, and gentle human being was most certainly present with us on the plains. In fact, I am sure I could hear him say: 'Do not worry, I am here.'

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