

HAJJ STORIES

PRAYING FOR CHANGE

APRIL 2025

'He is a good husband,' she said. 'No, he is not,' I thought. I did not, however, say it aloud. 'He brought me to the Holy Lands to perform Hajj,' she wryly smiled. 'No, he did not,' I again thought to myself. We were in Madinah where she came to see me about her chest infection. She was ecstatic to have been blessed to start performing the fifth pillar of Islam. She and her husband were travelling with his parents. It was evident that she had an excellent relationship with her in-laws and that she deeply respected them. In turn they treated her as their own child, and she was more in their company than their son. It seemed like the ideal travelling quartet, except it was far from perfect. Just like there was a discordance between her words and my thoughts, so there were underlying tensions which painted a far less rosy picture than the surface appearance.

'To both of them Hajj was a transformative experience'

Her husband was very well-spoken and had an absolutely charming personality. He could be the centre of a conversation within a few minutes. He had a true gift for words, but his words were empty and hollow. Beneath the camouflage of colours was a soul and heart devoid of feelings. He absolutely lacked passion, compassion and humanity. He suffered, if suffered is the appropriate word, from an inability to see any wrong in what he did, and at times left a trail of destruction. He had no criminal intent, he just had no insight into the results of his actions. He lacked any insight, and even though he was loved unconditionally by his wife and parents, he was unable to feel it and reciprocate. He was not a narcissist, for narcissists care about themselves above anyone else. He had a personality disorder where he could not care less about the consequences of his actions on himself or anyone else.

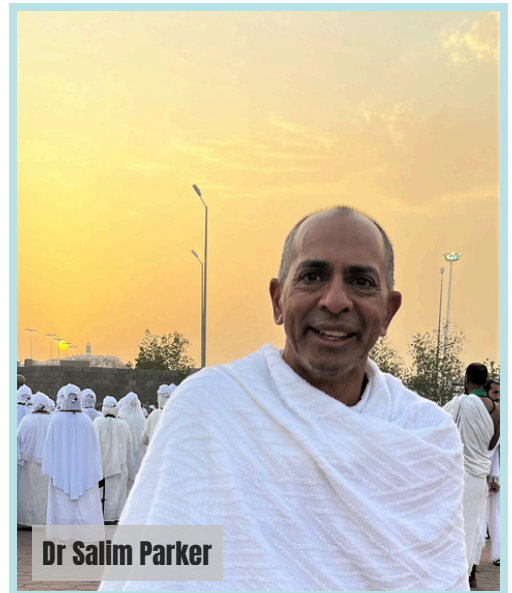
His parents were aware of him being different since he was young. Taking other kids' possessions whilst at school led to his parents frequently being summoned to the principal's office. In his mind the objects were not jealously guarded by anyone and had no labels, so he could take temporary ownership of it until he lost interest in it. Then he would discard it in whichever way was easiest, whether tossing it out of a moving car's window, dumping it in a bin or just leaving it at the place where his attention and fancy faded. His parents always claimed that he never deliberately transgressed or set out to hurt anyone. In their minds he utterly lacked insight into the consequences of his actions and could be taught different approaches. He saw a stream of psychologists and other medical professions as well as those who professed religious healing skills.

He learned partly to adapt to a certain extent and

avoided certain actions not because he knew it was wrong, but rather because he knew that some form of punishment would follow. He developed compensatory strategies by talking his way out of trouble, using lies, deceit and deception as easily as breathing in oxygen. For him societal norms were blurred when compared with societal realities. Substance abuse was rife all around him. Though his family lived in one of the more affluent suburbs of the Cape Flats, all the ills that plagued the community did not escape anyone and he got drawn into a particular group whilst still in high school. Selling drugs became an easy source of income. In many parts of the world it is considered high risk, but in his community it was prevalent. Colluding cops and neighbours silenced by fear of retribution if they spoke out, facilitated the illicit business.

He met his future wife whilst still in high school and they married soon after matriculating. She was aware of his different personality, was warned of him being involved in the drug trade but was completely smitten by him. She and his parents continuously tried to convince him to stop his illegal activities, convincing themselves that it was the cause of his personality problems and not the other way around. His parents were relatively well off and had performed Hajj before. To both of them Hajj was a transformative experience, and they knew of many in their community who completely changed for the better after their pilgrimage. They convinced their son to undertake the journey and of course his wife was also very keen. There was an initial disagreement amongst them in that the son wanted to fund his journey from the proceeds of his drug dealings. His parents insisted that they would pay.

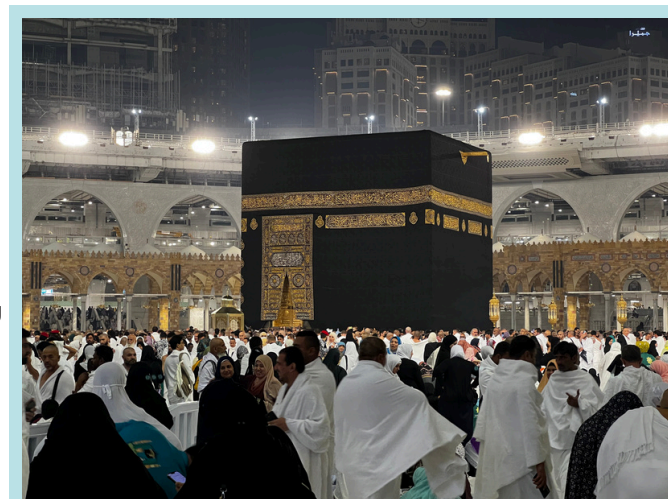
He consulted me in Makkah a few weeks later. After attending to his medical condition, he started suddenly talking about his life without being prompted. He never used drugs himself, he said and always warned his customers of its harmful effects. Some of the profits is used to support widows and orphans according to him. 'Selling cigarettes is legal. There is a warning on the packet warning of its harmful effects. It kills many more people than drugs but is still legally sold. Muslims stock it in their shops. Alcohol in South Africa has devastating social, medical and psychological effects, yet is an integral part of our economy. No one tries to stop the illegal shebeens lining many of the township streets but my business is always under threat of closure,' he told me, trying to rationalise his business operation in an ocean of irrationality.



Dr Salim Parker

I attempted debating his train of thought with him. I have dealt with many cases like him in my career. It is similar to trying to convince a drug addict to be admitted for rehabilitation when he evidently does not believe that he needs help. Often the rest of the world means well, just as parents and teachers mean well when forcing a drug addict to go for rehabilitation even when there is no desire in the mind and heart of the addict to be helped. I asked him about his plans after Hajj and he vaguely mentioned maybe quitting his current endeavours if the income from other sources could match it. In other words, he had no intention of stopping his drug trade. Before the first day of Hajj, I saw his wife and parents for different medical conditions. They were pinning their hopes on him receiving his ultimate guidance during the journey.

I saw him a few days later on Arafat at the time of Wuqoof. He was sauntering around whilst the rest of the pilgrims were in earnest conversations with their Creator. 'Labaki! We are here! The words reverberated across the vast plains. He most definitely was physically present there. There and then, I made Duaa that his heart and mind was not only present, but also receptive to the infinite mercies that Allah promises us on this day and that he would think of life as prescribed by our Deen. Rationally I could not foresee a change in him. However, the power of Duaas has stunned me into realizing that Allah is the ultimate decision maker.



The desire for change must come from within

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