

HAJJ STORIES

A MOTHER'S MIND

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The soft sunlight gently eased into her kitchen through an open door leading to her yard that revealed a mosque minaret a few steps away. She was listening to her granddaughter, seated at the kitchen table, reciting the Quran, trying to memorise her lesson for the day. The late afternoon Adhan, call to prayer, started sounding, reminding the faithful to seek the spiritual interlude during their daily overwhelming chores. Her seven-year-old grandson skipped past her. His madrasa bag, secured by a secure band around his neck, bobbed on and off his hip. 'Salaam Granny and sis,' he greeted as he left for mosque. She smiled whilst the recitation at the table continued, with the granddaughter determined to have mastered her lesson when the Adhan was done. Someone entered the back door and closed it. She could not hear the Adhan anymore. The recitation stopped. The kitchen darkened. Her harmonious world shattered into turmoil. Again.

'His mother had always had one dream: that one day he would perform Hajj.'

She lived in a modest small home on the Cape Flats and got married when she was barely twenty. Her life, and that of her husband, until he passed away, revolved around providing the best they could for their three boys. It was a truly Islamic environment, with three different Adhans audible at any time from their house, and all neighbours collectively considering all children in their area as their own. Their three boys, aged four years apart, walked to school and Madrasa together, fought for and fought each other, and all had their long-term dreams. She and her husband, to great fanfare and blessings from their community, embarked on their compulsory Hajj when their children were in their teens, with the youngest one fifteen years old. Hajj was their first travel ever, and they returned home filled with gratitude and a desire to further entrench an already existing Islamic ethos solidly into their children. It was sadly not to be for their youngest.

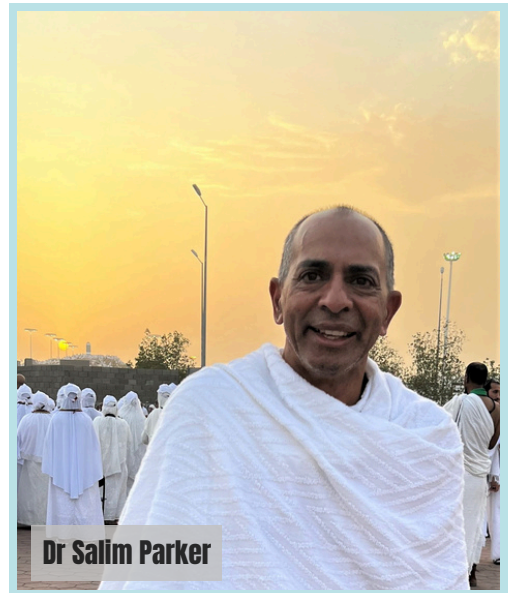
'I need money, I need it now,' he hissed threateningly. Her granddaughter, his daughter, silently slid down the chair and then cowered to an adjacent room. He was oblivious of his daughter, more fixated on inducing as much fear and extracting as much currency as possible. 'What do you need money for?' she asked redundantly. 'You can go work for your expenses, your ex-wife and I are taking care of your children, you only come here demanding material things. You did not even greet me now and your daughter is not only scared of you, but she also gets nightmares every night!' she screamed. She could see that he was high on drugs, and raising her voice would raise the alarm for neighbours to be alert. He toned

down dramatically. 'They're going to kill me if I do not pay them,' he said. He started sobbing. She had no idea whether he was lying or not. But she was not going to chance it. She handed over some cash. Again.

When she and her husband returned from Hajj all those years ago, they noticed a change in their youngest. His brothers told them that he started mixing with some dubious characters. The friends could provide him with an alternate reality, the parents could but provide food, prayers and books. He went into rehabilitation more than once and on one occasion they believed he was clean. So did his high school sweetheart and they married just after finishing high school and moved into her house which her deceased parents left for her. His wife tried hard, but two children and countless heartaches and beatings later, she asked him to leave. When his father passed away, she asked her two children's grandmother to move in with her. This arrangement was perfect for all as the children had someone at home whilst their mom was working.

He sadly got killed. It was not revenge for money owed. Rather he experimented with an unknown new drug which made him believe he had superhuman abilities. He apparently ran onto a highway in a manic frenzy, believing that the oncoming cars would bounce off him. Instead, he bounced off a truck's bonnet, broke numerous bones, bled profusely and brazenly still boasted that he was breathing just fine. He was not. His breathing hastened before the ambulance could reach the accident scene, his delusion receded, and his heart finally stopped beating. His mother had to identify his body in the local morgue, and after the family rallied resources, he was buried in a grave next to his father's.

His mother had always had one dream; that one day he would perform Hajj. Her obligatory journey was cherished with the realization that Allah's capacity to forgive exceeds mankind's capacity to sin, that no matter what preceded the journey, Hajj could unshackle from all bondages provided the will is there. That would unfortunately not be possible. She considered a second possibility and that was for someone to perform the Hajj on his behalf, the Badl Hajj. Initially she wanted to pay someone to do it on his behalf. Her eldest son was acutely aware of his mother's plan and when he was ready to perform his Fard Hajj, he requested her to accompany him and his wife. This was in the days before quota systems were in place. To the rest of the world, she had a wonderful son who was taking her on a second Hajj, an acknowledgment of what a wonderful, perfect and deserving mother she was. 'Why do you consider yourself a failure as a mother?' I asked her. We were in Azizyah a few hundred meters from the valley of Mina to where we would go to in a few days for the first day of Hajj. I first saw her in Madinah where she had a bad foot



Dr Salim Parker

infection. She needed a change of wound dressings every few days for a few weeks and this required visits in Madinah, Makkah and Azizyah. It was evident from our conversations that she was overwhelmed by guilt. She was initially very reticent, but that day she for some reason could not contain all the built-up emotions. 'I failed my son, I failed to protect him,' she sobbed. It did not matter that all the evidence proved that she was not at fault. In the heart of a mother any mishap that strikes her children leads to more soul-searching. From the conversations I had with her son it was evident that she was the perfect mother and grandmother.

I arranged a psychologist who also happened to be on the journey to speak to her, as well as one of our learned scholars to give the Islamic perspective of her inner conflict. She was prepared to engage with them. I had the opportunity to briefly chat to her on Arafat at the time of Wuqoof. She profusely thanked all who assisted her. The scholar joined us.

'Your intentions of performing your son's Hajj are noble and by Allah's Will it will be accepted,' he said. 'There is reward for him and there is reward for you from our Creator. Now you need to reward yourself. Your first compulsory Hajj was to seek relief from your prior sins and pray for a sin free future. This Hajj you ask Allah to forgive your son and relieve yourself of your misplaced guilt. Jannah lies at the feet of a mother, and you already have one foot in there. You will surely enter no other place,' he added. Tears rolled down her face. She realised that whilst she was seeking salvation for her son, she was unconsciously seeking redemption for herself. 'I believe Allah's mercy will descend on all of us,' she smiled. 'Labaaik!' She was there. She had arrived.



In Madinah, the City of Tranquility, her mind was in turmoil.