

# Serving and being served



## HAJJ STORIES

On more than one occasion, one of the religious leaders would gently try to persuade him not to treat his wife like a slave, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

‘HOW I wish I could be served as the lord of the manor!’ he smirked.

The two of us were sitting at breakfast in our hotel in Makkah. Hajj was to commence in about two weeks.

We had already spent more than a week in a relatively empty Makkah cherishing every moment gifted to us to be near the Kaabah.

Initially, we could complete a tawaaf within ten minutes but as the crowds increased daily by the thousands initially, and then by the tens of thousands daily, later on, we all knew that the most important time in the life of a Muslim, the Wuqoof on Arafah, was fast approaching.

There was, however, enough time to socialise every morning at breakfast, where new friendships were being fostered and sound advice was being dispensed.

It was also a time to observe the peculiarities of our fellow pilgrims without ever getting to know them.

It was one of these daily routines that was the source of his irritation.

The couple had breakfast at nearly the same time every day. And every morning we witnessed the routine of the wife doing about ten rounds from their table to the serving area, dutifully obeying her husband’s instructions.

If the glass of cold juice had stood too long on their table and he deemed it too warm for his palate, he would command her to

fetch him a glass more suited to his frozen personality.

On more than one occasion, one of the religious leaders had gently tried to persuade him not to treat his wife like a slave.

There was nothing physically wrong with him and he could with great dexterity weave his way through crowds when going to the Holy Mosque to perform the daily prayers.

He went alone, as he was of the firm belief that his wife should not perform her obligatory prayers behind a male who is not related to her.

No, she had to perform her prayers in the solitary confinement of her room.



When we see a healthy-looking man casually walking next to a woman who is clearly struggling to push a wheelchair-bound person in tawaaf, we can get quite agitated but all is not always what it seems.

Photo SALIM PARKER

My friend was quite vexed one such morning when a similar scenario played itself out. ‘Let’s perform a tawaaf,’ I proposed.

‘On the roof!’ he suggested. ‘I need to burn some energy and find inner peace.’

I always derive immense satisfaction and deep appreciation when circumambulating the Kaabah. The roof is an ideal place when the crowds are vast and performing a tawaaf on the ground floor becomes an exercise in pushing, endurance and injury avoidance.

It was not that hot yet and we made our niyah and commenced the first of our seven rounds. As we walked, we noticed a young Turkish lady struggling to push a wheelchair occupied by an elderly gentleman, most likely her father or father-in-law.

Next to them walked a strong, young man and he chatted to them all the time. My friend assumed him to be her husband. The scene infuriated him. The morning’s incident at the hotel was still clearly bothering him.

‘Look how she is struggling!’ he exclaimed. ‘And her husband is doing nothing! I would not be surprised if that is her father-in-law she is forced to push in the wheelchair while her husband grins away,’ he continued.

We watched as she struggled and frequently stopped to compose herself and garner some more energy. Her assumed husband would also stop and gesticulate something to her to which she would vigorously shake her head and then start again. At no stage did he attempt to push the wheelchair.

My friend and I decided that we could not allow this to continue. The least we could do was to offer our assistance and it could either be accepted or rejected.

‘Look there!’ my friend said, pointing to a man pushing a wheelchair on which his wife and child were seated. ‘That is how it should be.’ The seated lady was reciting from the Quran while the child on her lap and her husband were repeating the verses after her.

It was truly the united and bonded family that Islam refers to and that we all cherish. The wife’s recitation seemed to fortify her husband’s resolve and it seemed that his strides got stronger, longer



The sight of a man pushing his wife and child in a wheelchair while they are reciting Quran is an example of the united and bonded family that Islam refers to and that we all cherish.  
Photo SALIM PARKER

and more focused as they put more distance between us and them.

We turned to the trio that had initially caught our attention and approached the young husband. We gently and in simple English offered to push the wheelchair on behalf of his wife. He looked bemused and did not respond. My friend then gesticulated wildly to show our exact intentions.

A smile crossed the husband’s face. ‘We want the barakah (reward) of assisting our father to perform his tawaaf,’ my friend said.

The husband started laughing and replied in impeccable English. ‘Please ask her to allow someone else to push my father,’ he said. ‘But ask her to allow me to be that person and receive the barakah.’

I realised that the interactions that we had witnessed between them was of him pleading to do the physical task of pushing the wheelchair and her vehemently refusing.

He informed us that his father had always been a benefactor to his wife’s family since they were small children. He had paid for her schooling and college education, and they had made him the happiest man on earth when the two decided to get married.

His wife overheard the conversation and started elaborating in perfect English. ‘I always wanted to repay my father-in-law in whatever way I could. When he asked us to accompany him on Hajj, we were elated but realised that we

could not afford it. He paid for everything and we were even more humbled by his noble gesture.

‘I pledged that I would perform tawaaf with him on at least one occasion. He suffered a stroke which left him weakened and mostly wheelchair-bound. The least I could do was this tawaaf. Yes, I tire easily but that is because I am so unfit. So now I am getting fit and getting rewarded,’ she said.

‘Yes, and preventing me from getting the reward,’ her husband butted in.

‘No, your permission for me to do this will guarantee you Allah’s blessings,’ she replied.

The next morning, my friend and I sat at our usual place. ‘I don’t think your favourite person is going to be served by his wife today. She sprained her ankle severely yesterday and is unable to walk. In fact, I advised her to use a wheelchair,’ I said.

‘She is probably going to wheel up and down to serve him,’ my friend sarcastically replied. Just then, the couple entered the breakfast room, the husband gently pushing the wheelchair. He pulled away one of the chairs at the table and manoeuvred her wheelchair into a comfortable position. Then an amazing sight unfolded. He walked up and down serving her. ‘Yo,’ my friend exclaimed. ‘We have not reached Arafah yet and already miracles are happening!’

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