

Dr Salim Parker

Desires and Obligations

‘I don’t know when I am going to perform Hajj!’ he exclaimed in exasperation. He just received the list of those who were fortunate enough to be accredited and, after scanning it a number of times, realised that his name was not on there. He put his name on the list about three years earlier and was acutely aware that the list extended into the thousands. Only about two thousand received the honour that year and the additions yearly is much more than that. This results in the waiting period getting longer and longer. ‘You will probably be jetting your way in the next year or two,’ I tried to console him. ‘In fact, you might even be able to go this year as some in some years nearly half of those accredited cannot undertake the journey for some reason or the other. ‘But I have been ready for years!’ he protested. ‘I have enough funds, am fit and healthy, and have learnt as much as I could about Hajj. It is compulsory for me to go, it is a debt I have to pay to my Creator,’ he said. I could not agree more.

‘But how can she apply to go for Hajj if she was not financially ready?’ I asked, thinking of the young man on whom it was incumbent to go.

A few days later I was approached to buy tickets for a fund raising event. On enquiring what it was for, I was informed that it was for a lady who intended raising enough money to pay for her Hajj package. ‘She was accredited this year!’ the seller excitedly said. ‘We are helping her to fulfil her dream to go on this once in a lifetime journey. Surely we shall be rewarded for assisting her,’ was the punchline. ‘I was impressed by the rallying of those around the prospective pilgrim. ‘Did she run into financial trouble or did some catastrophe cause her to lose the money she saved for this Holy Journey?’ I asked. I have encountered numerous cases of sudden and unexpected disease, death in the family, deception and personal divisions dealing a severe blow to hard earned savings. In a number of cases family, friends and the familiar anonymous benefactor came to the rescue if the intending stricken pilgrims did not innovate a solution themselves. Sometimes the journey is delayed by years or even decades. I know of a few who were recalled by Allah before the injustice of being robbed by the unscrupulous could be reversed.

‘No, she never had enough money to perform Hajj. She never had the means but she always dreamt of performing the pilgrimage. So she put her name down on the list for accreditation years ago and Alhamdulillah, she was granted her wish this year. We must ensure that she accomplishes her wishes and must assist her as much as we can. Surely you can identify with the desire of someone in that situation Doc?’ I was asked. ‘But how can she apply to go for Hajj if she was not financially ready?’ I asked, thinking of the young man on whom it was incumbent to go. ‘Readiness is relative,’ came the answer. ‘Who can say whether a pilgrim who is financially sound is better spiritually

prepared or would benefit more emotionally?’ I thought of a teenager who walked with me more than a decade ago to Arafat on the Day of Wuqoof. I’ll never ever forget his question. ‘Why do we go to Arafat Doc? Why do we go there?’ These questions were posed by a youngster who had memorised the entire Quran, who was wearing his Ihram and had already recited his intention to perform Hajj.



No one except our Creator truly knows the dreams and desires of our Hujjaaj

However circumstances were vastly different then and he would be the first to admit that the journey had the most positive effect on him. Where he once was a reserved and introverted person, he now teaches and inspires others to perform the pilgrimage. The obstacles that time were health, wealth and means of travel. There was no issue about a restriction on numbers during that time. Families, clans and sometimes whole villages are known to have travelled together in previous generations. They did not take the place of someone on whom the journey was compulsory. Currently the quota method, whereby each country’s number of pilgrims per annum is determined as a percentage of their total Muslim population, works on a first come, first served basis. There is no one to, and no way of, scrutinising financial or health issues. Some are known to have deliberately put their names on the list knowing full well that they could not ever afford to go.

‘So Doc, how many tickets are you going to take for this worthy cause?’ I was once again asked. It was an interesting dilemma. Should there be a campaign to ensure that someone like the lady in question should be counselled and advised that there are others on whom the Hajj is obligatory such as the healthy and wealthy young man? I thought back of the many sickly and terminally ill that I have encountered in my career as a Hajj doctor. It was not definitely not obligatory on them to perform what turned out to be their final

journey. However they all wanted to go. They all had it as their only remaining wish for their precious little time that they had left on this earth. True, Hajj was not compulsory on them but it was definitely not forbidden. I have seen a pilgrim who had the blessing of a fulfilled and completed Hajj minutes before departing from this temporary abode. I have encountered others who were recalled a few days, weeks or months after

completing the fifth pillar of Islam. The contentment and acceptance that Hajj brought to them was the ultimate reward for all those who assisted them.

Who can ever stop the desire to set foot for Hajj? The gentleman who went for Hajj for a few consecutive decades when there were no restrictions decided to sponsor one different needy person every year when it became clear that he could not go himself. Many grappled with the issue of his undoubtedly noble gesture of assisting a poor person to circumambulate the Holy Kaba’a was depriving someone on whom the journey was obligatory. There have been moves afoot to curtail the numbers of sickly pilgrims already. Should only doctors make decisions of who may travel or should financial experts calculate the financial status of applicants and the Ulema assess the spiritual, educational and emotional maturity of the hopeful traveller?

"And proclaim the Hajj among men: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways." [Surah Al-Hajj 22:27]. It was and is known that the modes of transport carried the full diversity of mankind. It shall forever be a journey that leads to shedding of weight due to difficulty, but blessed with an accumulation of wisdom.