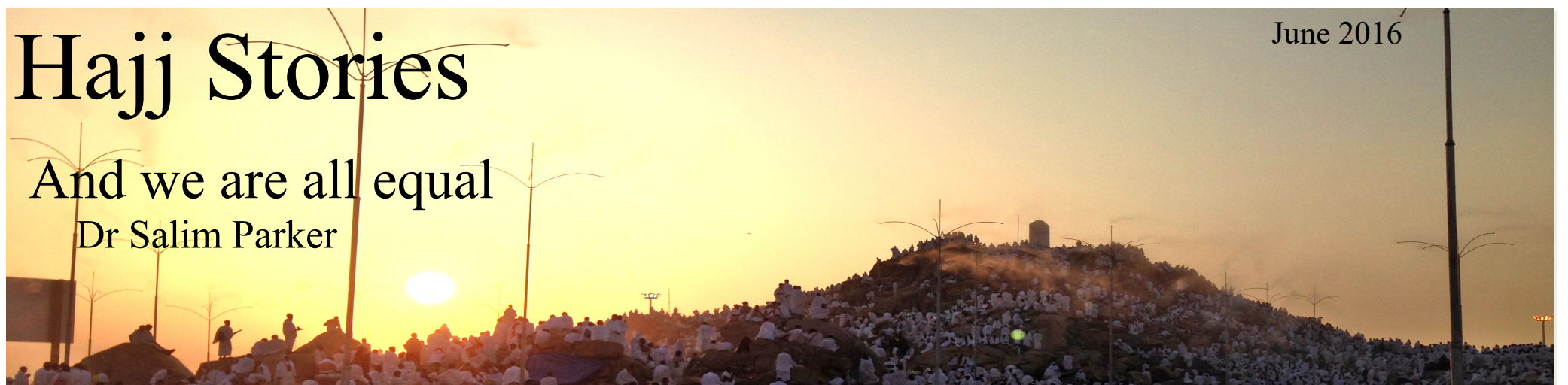


Hajj Stories

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And we are all equal

Dr Salim Parker



‘I know your brothers!’ someone exclaimed. She smiled. ‘Yes, they are well known, highly qualified in their respective fields and are very active in their communities. My parents and I are very proud of them, especially how they give back to their community. I don’t see much of them though as I got married and live quite far from them, in a completely different city. But I am lucky; one of them is here in Makkah with me, also here to perform Hajj.’ She was radiating peace and excitement as she and her husband prepared to perform their Umrah. They had arrived a few hours earlier after a long exhaustive journey, with Makkah’s oppressive heat and swelling masses of pilgrims not putting a damper on their spirits at all. ‘All the people here are the same as us,’ she said. ‘We all have the same desire to see the Ka’baa, perform our Umrah and spend as much time as possible in the Haram. We are all equal in who we are and what we want to do.’

The days of Hajj were fast approaching and she and her husband met up with her brother and together performed Tawaaf for their parents. It was a time of immense significance for her as it was her first visit acceptance of the invitation sounded out thousands of years ago by Nabi Ebrahim. She had boundless energy and her slight frame and short stature belied her abilities and determination to navigate the seemingly impenetrable crowds as she went to the Haram to perform the five daily prayers. She was less than a mere speck in the crowd but she never was just a speck and never was lost in her intentions and intensity.

I was privileged to be consulted by her. Like her siblings, she was highly qualified and had a university degree. She spoke lovingly of her children back home and how she missed them. She and her husband were of course already planning to come back soon to Saudi for an Umrah, with their children. I noticed some tell-tale marks on her. I expected her to have some demanding office job related to her qualification. I indirectly asked her about any strenuous physical activities she may be taking part in which would explain what I observed. I asked her about her work as well. ‘I work as a char,’ she said as a matter of fact. ‘Oh,’ was my surprised reaction, but the job description explained what I noticed. ‘Yes, I scrub floors, I vacuum carpets, I dust and polish; you name it and I can do it,’ she added. She looked at me intently. ‘Do your brothers know?’ I asked. ‘No!’ she replied, ‘and I do not want them to know.’

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She went on to explain how an office job with fixed hours would imprison her between four walls and deprive her of the flexibility that her occupation afforded her. Besides that she had some exposure to the precious sun which most deskbound slaves do not even know exist in abundance. She is able to take her

children to school in the morning, get to one of the places of employment and finish off before midday. Thereafter she fetches her younger kid, revises with her and sees to her needs before the youngster goes to Islamic school and then she goes to her second job. By the time she is done there, both her children are done at their respective schools and she picks them up. ‘My life works out perfectly for all of us,’ she smiled. ‘I can decide when I want to work so if my children are not well or if my family come to visit, I simply make arrangements to work another day,’ she added.

me how prejudiced we were about the social statuses of different careers. What struck me even more was the realisation that so many highly qualified Muslims with much, much more never ever would reach the plains of Arafat. She was here now in Makkah, a few days before the most momentous day in the lives of all followers of Islam having journeyed whilst at ease on her knees.

Ramadaan puts those who have in touch with those who have not and humbles the more fortunate to open their hearts to generosity. It is a great leveller and the



When the sun rises on Arafat we are all humbly equal in front of our Creator

‘Would you be disappointed if your sister worked as a char?’ she suddenly asked me. ‘What does your husband say?’ I in turn asked. She explained that he would have no problems with her staying at home and not working and seeing to the children. He also puts absolutely no pressure on her to work either and it was solely her decision which he supported. They were not rich at all, but they were comfortable, had their own house and car and had most of life’s necessities. They could also have the occasional luxuries. It was evident that she had her life all worked out. ‘I would have been disappointed if my sister did not accept any of my assistance if you were my sister,’ was my response to her initial question. ‘Why?’ she asked. ‘Should a doctor not have a relative who works on the open labour market and is commended by her employers for the work she does? Or is it merely a social stigma?’

She had relatively wealthy brothers and I knew them. I wondered what their reaction would be but it seemed that she could read my mind. ‘I think everyone would be proud of the fact that the money I earned so far allowed us to put our children into very good schools. We could go on holiday and,’ she said as she spread her hands and pointed towards the general direction of the Ka’baa, ‘we are here in the most holiest place on earth!’ There was a tone in her voice that echoed amazement, contentment and deep gratitude. It struck

normally well fed feel occasionally and temporarily feeling the constant pangs of hunger of the impoverished. Hajj is the greatest equaliser of all, achieving the remarkable feat of elevating all those assembled on the plains of Arafat from mere kings, humble chars, and achieving teachers to the status of being as close to Allah as would ever be possible. She would be on Arafat not as a char but as a mother, the highest in rank in the eyes of our Creator. Her brother would be there not as a highly acclaimed professional but as a mere mortal, nakedly stripped of all titles and clad uniformly as all others with two simple pieces of cloth.

‘I would be proud of a sister who without any second thought would toil to reach the soil of the Holy Land,’ I said. ‘I would however like her tell me if she needs any assistance as I would gladly help as an act of love and not out of social embarrassment,’ I added. A few days later we were all on Arafat. She and her husband were immensely proud and grateful that her brother was there as well to share some of the moments were her. ‘We are all equal here,’ she said. ‘Labaik!’ We all came in different ways to be equals in front of our Creator.

salimparker@yahoo.com