

Hajj Stories

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Policing the Sickly Desperate

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‘Please let me go for Hajj. My doctor says I am not healthy enough to perform this journey.’ He looked like hundreds that consulted me before when they readied for the most important journey of their lives. He looked like any of the hundreds of thousands that are visible every year performing Tawaaf, Sa’ee, making their way to Mina, Arafat and then all the way back to Makkah. They are not superstar athletes, but neither are they on the verge of breathing their last breath. They tire easily, and need to rest every 10 minute or so. Some are permanently wheelchair bound, some need constant attention due to immobility or severe disease, whilst others limit their physical activities to the bare essentials to preserve their strength for when Hajj climaxes on Arafat during Wuqoof.

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‘My doctor says that Hajj is not compulsory for me and he does not want me to travel as it could compromise my health,’ he sadly said. ‘I wanted your opinion.’ He did not want my opinion; he wanted me to say that he can travel first to Madinah to say salaam to our Creator’s final Messenger. He wanted me to approve him then to travel to Makkah for his Umrah, to greet the Ka’baa and drink from the well of ZamZam. His eyes pleaded for his body to finally transport his soul to Arafat and be as close to his Creator as would ever be possible. His heart longed for that sweeping unconditional forgiveness that Allah would then extend to those sincerely asking for it. Finally, his words very, very clearly indicated that he wanted me to somehow find a way to facilitate that he returns as sinless and innocent as a new-born child. I looked at him and realised that his desire to perform the fifth pillar of his religion would make him move mountains. It was my duty and indeed honour to try and assist him to instead soar over them.

‘Allah has made Hajj not compulsory for the sick as an act of Mercy, so that there is no guilt or sense of not accepting the invitation extended thousands of years ago by Nabi Ebrahim,’ I replied. I recounted to him the many autobiographies I read about journeys undertaken from Spain, India and even further afield centuries ago all centred on reaching Arafat at the time of Wuqoof. Many demised along the way, some journeys lasted for years, just as the Quran proclaimed: "And proclaim the Pilgrimage 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." [22:27]

He looked at me sadly. ‘Yet my fate is your hands. I would probably die of a broken heart if I am declared unfit to travel.’ I could see the desperation in his eyes. ‘You are blackmailing me!’ I laughed. ‘Not all Doc,’ he replied. ‘Here you are policing my health and will

make a decision which you believe is the correct one.’ I tried to protest. ‘We only declare people unfit to travel if there is a clear danger to their health or the health of others. Someone with an infectious disease should not travel and someone who just had a heart attack has a high chance of dying even before they board an aircraft. Remember that for doctors the preservation of life is much more important than rituals,’ I replied. He smiled. ‘I would have gone on Hajj years ago already Doc,’ he replied. ‘But I trusted someone with my money. In fact you vaccinated him just now as I saw him leaving your rooms. He is going to perform Hajj with my money, money that he stole from me. Who is going to police that?’ he asked sadly.

He told me how he as a tradesman of moderate income saved for years in order for him and his wife to perform Hajj. His so-called friend convinced him that investing it in the friend’s business would quadruple his money. This never materialised and he soon realised that he was not the only one duped in this way. The years passed and his wife passed away, never ever setting foot on the soils of Arafat. He committed himself to save and first perform his Hajj and then a year or two later his wife’s Badl Hajj.

‘Why did you not go the legal route and try to get your money back?’ I asked. ‘We worked on trust, there was no legal contract and I was advised that it would cost a lot of money to prove that I handed over my money to him. But that is in the past. Doc it is said that health, honest income and being of sound mind are essential for Hajj. You are checking on my health and the whole world, even if they are informed of his dubiously acquired wealth, will say that Allah will decide whether that unscrupulous man’s Hajj will be accepted. Why can my Creator not decide whether my decision to travel is acceptable or not?’ he continued.

‘I do not decide, I recommend,’ I reply. ‘I see no reason why you cannot fly and the free medical facilities in Saudi Arabia will be much more accessible to you than the overcrowded and inadequately staffed one in your area.’ I went on to advise him about what precautions to take, how to make the most of the intensely spiritually fulfilling journey anyone could ever undertake, and especially how to preserve his health so that he would be in optimal health when he reached Arafat. I knew that he was travelling with a number of family members and that he had a good support structure.



We can police the health of Hujaaj, but who is going to monitor if their funds are halaal?

But now he was not in the best of health and he feared that he would not be able to go, and the chance of still performing his wife’s a few years later highly improbable. I immediately knew who the person was who he claimed robbed him of his lifelong dream. No one was going to stop that person from travelling to the Holy Lands as only health was being policed. No one asked if he had the means to pay for his travels. No one enquires about whether he has settled his debts. In this case no one asked if his Hajj money was legitimate.

‘I cannot police the ill-gotten gains of people,’ I said in parting. ‘But we are not here to stop people from embarking on the journey except when their lives are in danger; we are here to assist and optimise their health. We are here to encourage all to soldier on, just as has been the case for centuries.’ Allah wa ‘Alam.

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