

Hajj Stories

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Going home, and never returning

Dr Salim Parker

‘I need to go home,’ I told my friend. He smiled and nodded understandingly. He lived in Madinah and whenever he left the city for whatever reason, he always could not wait to return home. I had just arrived in Madinah having completed Hajj the day before. In fact some Hujjaaj were still in the valley of Mina where they spent three days of pelting instead of the two days that I did. Leaving after following in the footsteps of our Prophet Ebrahim on the second day afforded me the opportunity to come home to the City of Peace and Tranquillity. It was going to be a visit of just over twenty four hours, but for someone who had been so close during the two preceding pilgrimages in Makkah and yet unable to greet our Beloved Prophet (SAW), even one minute would have appeased the intense longing. ‘We’ll leave soon,’ he said, urging me

‘His mind was imprisoned by a diseased body, yet his soul liberated by his religion.’

to at least have something to eat. I am sure he noticed my haste but he was calm and sagely.

‘Would you mind first seeing to a patient?’ he asked. Of course I could not refuse. I had enough time and seeing to the health of a stricken pilgrim was always my immediate and first priority. ‘In fact it is two South Africans, an eighty seven year old man and his seventy nine year old wife. They live on the way to the Haram so it’s not out of our way,’ he continued. ‘Elderly South Africans resident in Madinah?’ I asked incredulously as I know most foreigners are evicted after reaching the age of sixty five. ‘I know how much you love Madinah, and I am going to introduce you to them as being as passionate about the City of Light,’ he said. ‘How passionate?’ I asked intrigued. The reply completely amazed me. ‘They came to Saudi Arabia forty one years ago,’ he replied. ‘And they never went back to South Africa.’

As we drove to their house he briefly informed me of their story. Whilst on hajj more than four decades ago the wife had a dream. In it she was informed by the Prophet (SAW) to stay in Madinah. There was no real debate about what they were going to do; they were going to stay. They lived in a mud house for more than thirty years with the husband doing various different jobs with the wife teaching local children to memorise the Holy Quran. Their kitchen had no roof but a large tree in the middle of it prevented overt problems during the rainy season. My friend and some others befriended them and a few years ago convinced them to move to a modest enclosed apartment which had a few basic necessities such as electricity and a separate bathroom. ‘The husband is quite sick; in fact he is completely bedridden. There are times when he does not speak at all but at other times you can hear him recite,’ I was advised. ‘And the wife?’ I asked, my curiosity aroused. ‘You’ll see,’ he smiled.

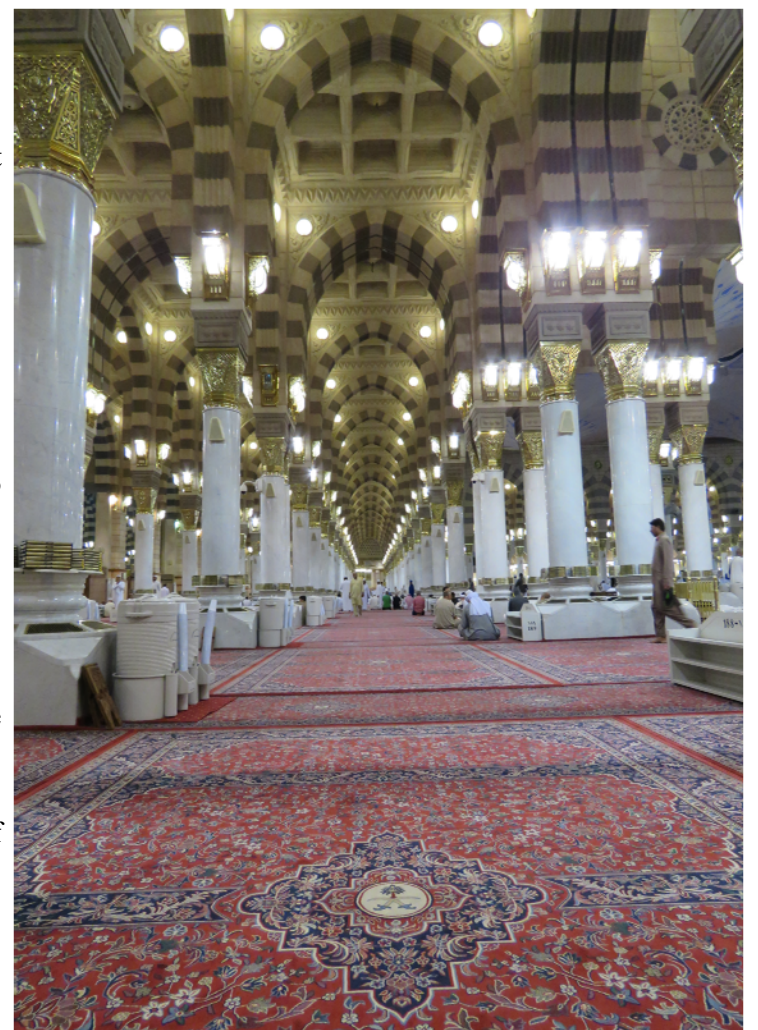
The small but very neat ground floor apartment had a welcoming entrance. The frail, small but very sprightly lady who looked thirty years younger than her nearly eighty years welcomed us into their house. She thanked us for coming to visit and insisted that we should have something to drink as it brings blessings to her household. Of course we could not refuse! I asked about her husband and, after she again profusely thanked me for offering to medically examine him, led us to his bed. He appeared completely immobile, and was only wearing an adult diaper and a vest. He was wasted from years of being sickly, with all his large joints bent into the foetal position. He was laying on his right side on the bed, facing Qibla and appeared initially appeared moribund. We greeted him and to my surprise he returned our greeting. Thereafter I could on occasion clearly discern the verses of the Quran that he was reciting very, very softly whilst I examined him.

His wife in the meantime was on the telephone, gently but firmly counselling a lady who was what sounded like marital issues. ‘You have to choose a path and Allah will guide you,’ she advised. After finishing her call, she confirmed the story that my friend related. ‘Did you not ever wish to go home to South Africa?’ I asked. ‘No, I was guided to stay in Madinah and I am still here four decades later. This is home. My brother once came to urge us to return, but I assured him that we want to stay in the Prophet’s City and that we as siblings will surely meet again, if not in this world then definitely in the hereafter. Which other place do you want to call home?’ she asked. She added that she is currently teaching sixty girls to memorise the Quran, many of them the daughters and some even the granddaughters of those that she taught.

They lived frugally, and once she covered their basic expenses from whatever income she received, she donated the rest to charity. ‘There are many worse off than us,’ she advised. She also collected bread that the locals could not finish consuming, cleaned it of any mould that might have collected, and feeds it to the goats and sheep in the area. ‘Insha-Allah, the animals will make dua for me,’ she said.

I noticed what looked like a book which her husband was trying to reach on his bed. ‘What is that?’ I asked. ‘He has to perform his Salaah,’ she said matter of factually. ‘That is his Tayamum box. He touches it and performs his compulsory ablution by touching his face and hands thereafter for each of the five daily prayers. He never misses a prayer,’ she added. I looked at him, his mind imprisoned by a diseased body, yet his soul liberated by his religion. ‘They are both living in the most serene City in the world, both lived and still living their lives to the fullest and both living embodiments of their Deen,’ my friend said.

When we wanted to leave just before Maghrib, she insisted on giving me some presents. ‘You blessed our house with your visit,’ she said. ‘I am immensely blessed to have been honoured to meet the two of you,’ I replied, struggling to keep the tears back. ‘You left your home forty one years ago and since then you have truly been home.’ I noticed the two clocks on their wall, one with the standard western time and one based on the old Arabic time. The one indicated the sun was about to set, the other heralded the start of a new day. She knew that I wanted to go to the Haram, to greet our Prophet (SAW).



Inside the Prophet's Mosque behind the resting place of Muhammad (SAW)

‘Go,’ and convey my salaams to Muhammad (SAW),’ she requested. As we drove to the Haram my friend informed me a bit more about them. ‘A wise man visited them and said that she keeps her husband motivated with her constant care, encouragement, love and dedication. The husband’s soul is being sustained by her and only when she is not around anymore will his life sustaining flame be extinguished.’

Thirty minutes later I was in the Rhodul Jannah, in the Prophet’s Mosque. It was my time to be all alone amongst thousands of others all yearning for the close proximity of the Kabr of Muhammad (SAW). At peace in the City of Light, time stood still, irrespective of which clock we use. Here, as always, we were truly home.

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