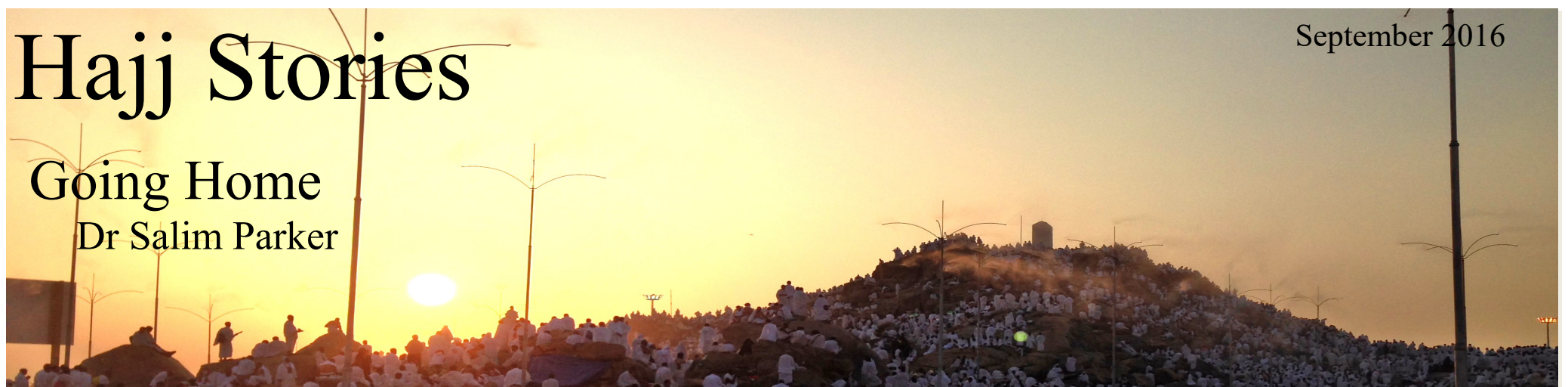


Hajj Stories

September 2016

Going Home Dr Salim Parker



He has not been home for three years. For two consecutive years he was so close to where his heart and soul longs for. A mere four hour taxi ride and the warm serene welcome of Madinah would have embraced him with the gentleness of a mother caressing her new born baby. It was not to be though. Hajj took precedent and there never was any thought of being ungrateful. The logistics of a short stay during Hajj, the fact that passports are confiscated by the Hajj authorities making travel outside of Makkah impossible, and the demands of work back in South Africa necessitating an early return precluded any thoughts of visiting the City of Light. What more could a person long for than standing on Arafat during the time of Wuqoof! What greater reward could a person ask for than serving those in need and assisting them in connecting to their Creator on the Day when more are forgiven than at any other time of the year!

“Those who have been privileged to have been there (Madinah) know of its magnetic attraction on our hearts, tugging us back.”

Visiting Madinah and greeting the Prophet (SAW) as well as conveying the salaam from others to their Muhammad (SAW) is not part of Hajj. It is however part of a complete journey, part of the a once in a lifetime response to an invitation extended thousands of years ago for the vast majority of Muslims that only get one opportunity ever to do so. Those who have been privileged to have been there know of its magnetic attraction on our hearts, tugging us back. Madinah has over the last 16 years become the home of his soul of millions of others. He had to make a plan to get there somehow. I was determined, no matter what, to make my way to Madinah even if it was for an hour or two. The longing to return was becoming unbearable.

I was not assured of the journey at all but too many to mention made duaa that I would get to Makkah somehow. Some went out of their way to assist by writing letters and making phone calls to motivate why I should be granted a visa. One in particular took my passport in at every opportunity whenever he visited the Saudi embassy in Pretoria with all the supporting documentation in order to virtually plead on my behalf. Time after time he would dejectedly inform me that they would not consider my application as my passport was filled with page after page of previous visas. He was of the persevering type however and one evening, way after midnight, he was on the road when he received a call that he has to fetch my passport. He initially thought that they did not want it in their offices at all but when he picked it up and had a look at it, he realised that I have been blessed with another opportunity to don my Ihram. Some friends say that I had another invitation, others say that I have to answer a calling to assist. I merely closed my eyes and thanked my Creator, and assume that this Hajj, like the fifteen

previous journeys, would be my last and I, as always, intended to gain the absolute maximum from the journey.

Hajj was immensely rewarding from an emotional and spiritual point of view. No two journeys are ever the same and assisting pilgrims to be as healthy as possible when they reach Arafat, the climax of the Hajj which the vast majority would only ever experience only once in their lives, is a wonderful way of also learning of their most intimate spiritual aspirations. Some diabetics merely needed information of how to transport their insulin safely in temperatures that were approaching fifty degrees, others needed advice about optimising their medication so that they would not need to excessively use ablution facilities. Hajj is indeed a spiritual and emotional experience, but the mundane issues of what to eat and drink and other issues of nature have to be considered. It was my duty to assure our pilgrims and put their minds at ease whilst simultaneously attending to their medical concerns.

I did not see her the next day, the day of Standing at Wuqoof on Arafat. The following evening, now back on Mina, I was about to dish supper. I had just chatted to my family back home in South Africa who had congregated at my house to celebrate Eid. A smiling lady approached me. ‘Salaam Doc,’ she said. I returned her greeting and commenced dishing. ‘Jazak-Allah so much; your medicines and duaas really helped. I had the absolutely perfect time on Arafat.’ A beaming, warm and very affable lady was speaking but I could not for the life of me place her. ‘It’s me,’ she smiled, realising that I did not recognise her. I could not believe the metamorphosis the miserable patient underwent! ‘You made my journey really, really worthwhile!’ I exclaimed.

Whilst I was seeing to patients, others were working behind the scenes to ensure that I would somehow get to fulfil my dream of getting to Madinah. Again someone went frequently to the passport office, explaining my case. Every time he was told to come



The serenity of the City of Light draws all Muslims back

One lady in particular was particularly difficult to manage, though no fault on her side. We had an epidemic of diarrhoea and she consulted me two days before Hajj commenced. She was a rather miserable, unpleasant and insular patient and clearly was not impressed with my assessment. She returned the next day, the day before Hajj, complaining that she was not well yet and was not going to Arafat to just sit in the bathrooms. We tried reassuring her and added extra medication. She again consulted me on the first day of Hajj on Mina looking even more irritated and vexed. She was clinically better but did not believe our assessment. ‘Allah wants you to be on Arafat. You are going to be fine tomorrow. We all make duaa for that and if you also believe it you’ll surely have a most wonderful Hajj,’ I said. She gave me a look of utter disgust. ‘Just get me better,’ she moaned and walked off.

back and he indeed went back. I left Mina after the second day of pelting whilst others stayed for a third night and slept in Azizyah. The next morning I awoke and found my passport next to my bed.

‘You have twenty four hours to visit Madinah before your flight back to South Africa from Jeddah,’ I was told. ‘I would have gone even if I had six hours,’ I replied. I was close to tears. After three years, after being so close during the previous two, I was finally going home. The desire to immediately leave was intense and a taxi was hastily summoned. I thought I was really longing to be in Madinah, to be close to our beloved Prophet (SAW). Little did I know that my attraction to Madinah was but a mere grain of sand compared to the Everest like love that a couple I was to meet on my way there experienced.
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