

# No money a good root



I have witnessed this many times before and was not certain what to expect next, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

'I SPENT all my money, Doc,' he said.

We were in Madinah and Hajj was still nearly a month away. Yet, he did not appear sad at all. In fact, he appeared unfazed, even jovial. He recounted how he got carried away with buying presents for all and sundry with working on some sort of budget completely thrown out amongst the mazes and alleys of the souks.

First, there were the compulsory gifts for the immediate family and friends who had worked tirelessly to entertain and feed the streams of well-wishers just before their departure to Saudi Arabia. There was never a shortage of savouries, food and beverages on the tables as some watchful eye somehow immediately replenished whatever had been consumed.

Those people were uppermost in his mind when he went on his frenzied buying binge and he, within a few days, had ticked off all the names of those for whom he had wanted to buy gifts.

He had also ticked off names that had not been there in the first place. Then, of course, there were the irresistible bargains that he thought he would never again be lucky enough to encounter – until he entered the store next door, that is!

He was sheepishly grinning when he recounted his experiences. I have witnessed this many times before and was not certain what to expect next. Sometimes, it was a prelude to prudent behaviour, sometimes, it led to a disguised demand for dealing out a bit of charity.

There were cases where a pilgrim in such a situation, either due to pride, embarrassment or uncertainty, would suffer from severe

hunger pangs amidst mountains of waste food excess. He admitted though that he had been influenced by the advice he was given by previous hujjaaj who had very readily given their expert advice.

'Buy everything in Madinah as it is cheaper, of better quality and available in all shapes and sizes,' was a common theme of what he was told.

'And I obliged without keeping count of the number of rands I had left. At least, I have no more items to purchase, I have done all I want to. In any case, I can't, even if I wanted to!' he added.

'At least you won't have to worry about food,' I replied, and we talked about the Hajj packages that included most meals in the price.

'You know Doc, I only realised how lucky I am yesterday. Every evening I would go shopping in Madinah for the past few days but last night, because I had no money, I just went to the Prophet's Mosque. Yes, it was still relatively busy but it was busy in an unhindered way.

'It was so peaceful, so serene and it made me realise the value of detaching myself from the material world. Of course, I want to reward all those who assisted me before I undertook this journey but now I am not sure whether clothing or some other souvenir can do

justice to my feelings of appreciation.

'I would rather want to tell them how supremely blessed I felt just being close to my beloved Prophet (SAW) and the wonderful tranquillity of Madinah,' he confessed.

'Well, you bought the presents, so now you can do both!' I replied. 'Hajj is still a few weeks away and, if you are already so spiritually inspired now, Insha Allah, you will feel even more close to your Creator when you stand on Arafah. Maybe the fact

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that you have no money is a good thing!' I mischievously added. I attended to his medical issues after which he made his way to the Haram.

I met him the next morning at the breakfast buffet of the five star hotel we were staying in. 'If you have only one indulgence from this lavish spread, you will not need to buy another morsel for the rest of the day,' I remarked. There were probably over twenty different cereals, pastries that would do a Parisian patisserie proud, and orchards of fruit.

'That is the irony, Doc, I am not out of money,' he replied. I was confused. Did he mean that he had spiritual currency in abundance now or was he going to live extremely frugally? Or both? He clarified his statement virtually immediately.

'The morning that I left South Africa, an old friend of my late father came to greet me. I have not seen him in years and, in fact, I felt a bit embarrassed when he arrived as I had completely forgotten about him and had not informed him of my intended pilgrimage.

'My father always reminded me to never forget our elders but somehow I slipped out on this particular person. Frail, weak and an octogenarian I felt humbled by his visit. He was the man who had set up my father on his first business venture decades ago and trusted him enough to repay the debt over a prolonged period. The gentleman moved to another city some time after that but always maintained close contact with my father,' he started to tell me.

He added that the gentleman had heard via the grapevine that my patient was going for Hajj and, as he was visiting Cape Town, decided to pay him a visit. The old man told him that it was his honour to visit an intending hajji and that the young man must in no way feel obliged to have informed him. When the gentleman left, he slipped, as is customary in Cape

Town, an envelope into the hajji's hand. 'Use it as your late father would have used it,' were his parting words. For some reason, he had not opened the envelope but, instead, had put it in a small prayer book that his father had given him some time back.

'I was sitting in the mosque last night and opened the prayer book. The envelope was still in there and I opened it. No, there was no money in there, just a small piece of paper. My first thought was how could I use it as my father would have used it? A mere piece of paper. The side I looked at was blank so I turned it around. It was a deposit slip. A deposit slip for a substantial amount of money,' he said. His father's friend had somehow got hold of his account details and had deposited the gift without any obligations. 'Do you need medication, Doc?' he asked.

I gratefully indicated that we were well stocked. I was aware of a lady who had been swindled out of some money that she had painstakingly handed over to a relative to save for her Hajj. Her operator was aware of her situation and had made arrangements for her to pay off her debts after the holy journey. 'I am only going to use this money for good causes like that,' he pledged.

He came to my consulting room later that day, carrying a plate of the most exotic chocolate cakes. They were not included in the Hajj package and I was well aware of the ridiculously high prices the hotel charged for such luxuries.

'Don't tell me you bought such expensive items!' I gently admonished him. 'Oh no, these are with compliments of the pastry chef that you attended to earlier,' he said. Winking, he added, 'Would I spend good money on a chocolate addicted doc?'



Even though the sun had set on his financial means, it dawned on his awareness of his spirituality in Madinah.

Photo SALIM PARKER