



His joy knew no bounds as he and his spouse had been invited as a small percentage of Muslims to stand on the plains of Arafah that year, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

A SHORT buzz on his mobile alerted him to the fact that a new message awaited his attention. A short few words that would require his speedy attention and reaction virtually immediately.

Thousands throughout South African awaited similar messages. Some had crafted their requests many years previously and were absolutely certain that they would receive a positive answer to their applications.

Some knew that they were in that borderline area, along with a few hundred others who were in the awkward situation of either being rewarded for their patience or being asked to wait another few weeks or even another year, depending on a number of permutations.

Others simply hoped and prayed that, even though thousands were ahead of them in the queue, somehow, through some quirk in the process, they would be fortunate to be elevated in time.

He looked at the screen of his phone. The message was short and concise. It informed him that he and his wife had been accredited to perform Hajj that year and very tersely instructed them to confirm their acceptance within a few days or else their names would be removed from the list.

He was elated but simultaneously devastated. His joy knew no bounds as he and his spouse was part of a small percentage of Muslims who had been invited to stand on the plains of Arafah that year to be as close to their Creator as would ever be possible in their lives.

He excitedly informed his wife and both of them burst out crying. Tears of joy flowed down her cheeks. They had saved, planned meticulously and had applied with considered calculations of the probability

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of being accredited that particular year. Now it seemed that all their dreams and hopes would be fulfilled.

Just six months earlier, they would have described life as perfect. However, a lot can happen in six hours, six days, six weeks and especially six months. Life had not been kind to them in those six months.

They had saved enough to undertake the journey. In fact, they had even budgeted to buy presents in Saudi Arabia for all their family members, and freight the gifts home to South Africa. Their ordinary monthly expenses of house bond, car and other necessities were accordingly budgeted for and money set aside.

As is the case of the vast majority of intending Cape Town pilgrims, their children were probably the least of their worries as there is no such phrase in the community termed 'extended family'. There is only family, family and more family.

Hajj in the Cape involves all and sundry, with family members of the hujjaaj intricately and wholeheartedly involved in all preparations. Sometimes, when sitting in the family's interactions, it is difficult to ascertain who is actually going for Hajj so animated and excited are everyone!

Their children would be cared for by immediate relatives who deem it an absolute honour, and a deed that the Creator will indeed reward.

Yet, six months ago, everything changed when his employer called him into his office. He knew their firm was experiencing financial difficulties due to the tough economic times. They were all aware that cost cutting and other austerity measures were introduced and that their boss was trying desperately to save their jobs.

However, he was not prepared for the devastating news that was to follow. The firm was closing down that very day and there was not even money for that month's salaries. No severance pay benefits, no immediate alternative employment, nothing.

He was aware that his boss had worked tirelessly behind the scenes to save the firm, that the employer had not drawn a salary for himself for a few months so that he could pay his staff.

He did not blame the man at all. However, the future was now uncertain. He might have been a good planner but his carefully worked out plan to perform his Hajj lay in tatters. Allah, however, is the ultimate planner.

They could not believe how their savings had been devoured. Other unforeseen calamities, such as illness which had to be paid out of their own pockets instead of the work subsidised medical aid further aggravated their rapidly deteriorating financial situation.

As the accreditation date drew nearer so did their hope of economic salvation recede. They had to make a decision of either accepting to go on Hajj that year or postponing. They looked at each other. The seed to perform the obligatory journey had been planted years ago when they

committed to accepting the invitation that had been extended thousands of years ago.

The stem was firmly rooted in fertile soil by the many classes they had attended and the numerous returning pilgrims they had been blessed to interact with. They did not hesitate. 'Yes, we accept,' they responded.

It was a strange balance sheet that they then filled in. On the positive side was the net effect of going to perform Hajj. That was non-negotiable. They sold their car. The net effect was that they were going to perform Hajj. They moved in with one set of parents and rented out their house. The net effect was that they were going to perform Hajj.

There were many such transactions with exactly the same results. Their resolve and commitment were unwavering. He, in the meantime, went for a number of interviews and two weeks before their departure date he was called in for a second interview by a company who were interested in his skills.

They offered him a permanent job with long term security and better remuneration than he had anticipated. He was overwhelmed. Allah was surely being merciful! However, there was one problem; he had to start the next week, a few days before his scheduled departure to Saudi Arabia.

He had a day to decide about his precarious position but he informed the interviewing panel immediately that he was not deviating from his chosen balance sheet. He explained to them that he desperately needed the job for his family's future financial stability and felt honoured that they had offered him the position.

He was prepared to shorten his pilgrimage but he was not prepared to cancel it. The company informed him that they regrettably could not comply with his wishes and would have to offer the position to someone else.

They came to consult me for a medical condition one day in Madinah about a week later and related their story to me. 'I feel completely at ease with my decision, Doc,' he said.

'We are in the City of Peace, the City of Light,' I replied as we marvelled at the serenity of the Prophet's City.

They were immensely grateful to be on the holy journey and knew that their children were well cared for by their grandparents.

A few days later, he approached me as I was having breakfast with a friend. He was smiling and his wife was beaming from ear to ear. 'Look Doc,' he said, showing me his mobile.

A simple clear message was displayed informing him that the company that had said that they could not keep the position for him was now willing to wait until his return. His Hajj had barely started and yet one of his journeys was already completed.

For more Hajj Stories visit www.hajjdoctor.co.za. You may contact Dr Parker via e-mail: salimparker@yahoo.com

We may plan but, ultimately, Allah SWT is the best of planners.

Photo SALIM PARKER

