



**Arafah and Hajj remind us of the stark interplay of our temporary existence on earth, our pre-ordained departure and how we manage that time, writes DR SALIM PARKER.**

**HAJJ** is Arafah. Arafah is the closest that we mere mortals ever get to our Creator, the day when we are in our ihraams, which resembles the cloth that we adorn when we depart this world. It is the day when Allah smiles on his worshipping subjects and when more are forgiven than on any other day of the year.

Ironically, in this submissive state, where we are reminded of our inevitable demise, our Creator encourages us to rekindle our humanity, humility, piety and God-consciousness, with a chance for us to emerge from the plains of Arafah as sin-free as a new-born child.

Death. Life. A new beginning, an end to old, bad ways.

Arafah and Hajj remind us of the stark interplay of our temporary existence on earth, our pre-ordained departure and how we manage that time.

It is known that those who pass away as martyrs are guaranteed heaven.

Anyone who is in ihraam when recalled by our Creator is considered a martyr and is blessed with a place in Jannah.

Many express the wish that their final breath be exhaled during their once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage, and some are given that honour while in a state of ihraam. Most, however, wish for the ultimate redemption that is associated with an accepted Hajj so that they can commence their remaining time on this temporary abode with a clean slate.

He was one of those who accepted whatever his Creator has planned. And we know that Allah is the ultimate planner.

There were subtle hints that he was preparing to not return to South Africa from Hajj. Some who greeted him before departure to

Saudi Arabia were puzzled by the cryptic messages he had given them. However, on deeper reflection, it became clear that he had been preparing them to bid farewell to him.

Even in Saudi Arabia, his wife could not initially understand some of his suggestions, such as buying presents for their loved ones as this was contrary to his usual practice of offering a duah for them.

I had seen him the day before Hajj, when he suffered an epileptic attack. I tried to ensure that he understood that he had to have his identification tags with him at all times in case he fell ill again. The identification tags would then ensure that his group leaders would be contacted.

# Death in a state of ihram

His parting words to me were, 'Allah knows best.'

The crowds are massive on Arafah and Mina every year. He and his wife reached Arafah without any issues and they reached out to their Creator during the time of Wuqoof, the apex of Hajj.

I had strongly advised him to travel by bus, and he had taken the bus from Arafah to Musdalifah after sunset.

This journey is very unpredictable and, after reaching Musdalifah, the group had split into smaller groups, and the couple, somehow, got separated from the rest.

They managed to get to Mina and pelted the largest of the Jamarat. They then tried to make their way back to their camp on Mina but could not determine their bearings due to the massive crowds.

He sat down and they shared some water and a fruit. As they were always travelling together, she kept his phone with her belongings. At one stage she had him in her sights, the next minute he was gone.

We are faced with these situations every year. Every year, people get lost and every year we inevitably are able to reunite them with the rest of the group. This year was no different. When his wife made her way back to the camp we assured her that we would find him.

We could not call him as she had his phone but we assumed that he had his identification tags on him. All he had to do was to show it to any official and they would either call the numbers displayed prominently on the tag, direct him to his camp or even escort him back to the rest of his family.

She was very uneasy when I spoke to her. It was evident that she had a nagging doubt that he would approach any of the officials. But, there was always the chance that he would run into someone of his group or that someone would recognise him and approach him.

That day, the Day of Eid, the Day of Celebration, was one of severe anxiety for his wife.

'He is in Azizyah!' a fellow pilgrim informed one of the group leaders. We excitedly informed his wife and a massive feeling of relief was felt by all of us.

We immediately contacted one of the members of the group to check on him. Once found, this contact would call our lost pilgrim's wife.

This person could find no trace of him. We then asked fellow pilgrims to search both our buildings in Azizyah, which was duly done. Again, no one could find him.

The person who had initially reported seeing him was then contacted and it transpired that he had seen someone who resembled our lost pilgrim in the vicinity of our building but had not actually made contact with him.

Still, we were not too worried. We sent his name to the hospital data base and they indicated that no one by that name had been admitted to any of the hospitals in the vicinity.

In retrospect, we should have asked them to check each of the four names that he had. Often, the hospital data base contains the name or second name as the surname so a search for surnames, even under the South African nationality, would not reveal anything.

The group started to get a bit concerned the next day when we had still not heard anything. All the other lost pilgrims had by then been found.

His wife was worried that he had simply sat down somewhere and made duah – as he had told his daughter he would do before his departure on this ultimate journey. No one will, among the millions present on Mina, ask someone who is sitting somewhere and praying whether they need assistance.

We do not know what transpired. All we know is that he was not reunited with us.

One of the group members went to the central hospital and a very kind receptionist there searched the entire data base. This was on the second day of Tashreeq, the second day of stoning.

He had a first name, two second names and his surname on all his cards.

The receptionist diligently entered all the names separately and came up with a match. 'He is in the hospital in Arafah,' it was revealed.

One of the group members had a vehicle and immediately set off to the hospital on Arafah.

I informed the wife that he had been found, and she told us that her daughter and son-in law, who were working in Saudi Arabia, were on their way to Makkah. We were at that time walking from Mina to Azizyah.

I reassured her that the medical facilities were world class for all hujjaaj and that he was in the best hands.

That was until I received a call from one of my colleagues. He told me that he was at the hospital and our pilgrim had been found.

I was walking alongside his wife at that time and excitedly asked him whether I should put her on the line with him. 'No Doc, please step away from her. They asked me to identify him at the hospital morgue.'

That last thirty minutes was one of the most difficult times of my life as the wife had been expecting to hear that he was well. Some other pilgrims asked me some medical questions and we, in the meantime, managed to ensure that her family would be there to meet her in Azizyah.

We broke the news collectively to them and tears flowed freely, not just amongst the family but amongst the rest of us.

We were assured that he was still in ihraam and that he was destined for Jannah.

He had, most likely, simply sat down somewhere, recited like a true martyr and waited for Allah to call him.

We asked ourselves whether we had done enough to keep him with us in order to make more duah for all of us. Allah alone knows the answer to that.

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Amid the hustle and bustle of people walking to and from the jamarats on the days of pelting, a person sitting alongside the road making duah will not be approached and offered help.  
Photo SALIM PARKER