

We plan but we are only human



He had no clue about the rituals of Hajj, no desire nor inclination to embark on the journey, and was certainly not by the financial means, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

ABDULLAH* was in his seventies, still relatively nimble, of sound mind and absolutely ecstatic. He had been accredited for Hajj!

He had saved for over ten years for this journey. He had little formal education and his low-key, civil servant job paid the bills but there was never enough to save. Prior to the last decade, his time, money and, in effect, his whole life revolved around his family.

He provided a comfortable dwelling for his wife whom he never wanted to work, while simultaneously seeing to the needs of his aging parents. His parents were recalled by our Creator first, and his wife soon thereafter, while she was relatively young.

He saw to the upbringing of his children and, two decades later, was involved in financially assisting his grandchildren.

Hajj was never on his mind until he was in his sixties. He had some spare time and decided to attend evening madrasah classes. The Hajj seed was planted.

Ahmed* was in his twenties and vaguely remembered telling his widowed, childless aunt some years earlier that he'd be her mahram one day when she performs Hajj.

Little did he know that she had listed his name with her application, and great was his shock when she announced that the two of them would be going as they had been accredited.

He had no clue about the rituals of Hajj, no desire nor inclination to embark on the journey, and was certainly not by the financial means. He decided that he would inform her that he would not accompany her and went to her house on a blisteringly cold, winter's day.

In fact, he recalled that the weather was as dark, gloomy and miserable as he felt. When she opened her door, the radiant glow on her face welcoming him, and the warmth of the family excitedly greeting him from inside the living room, embraced him. 'I am so blessed that you are accompanying me,' his aunt lovingly smiled.

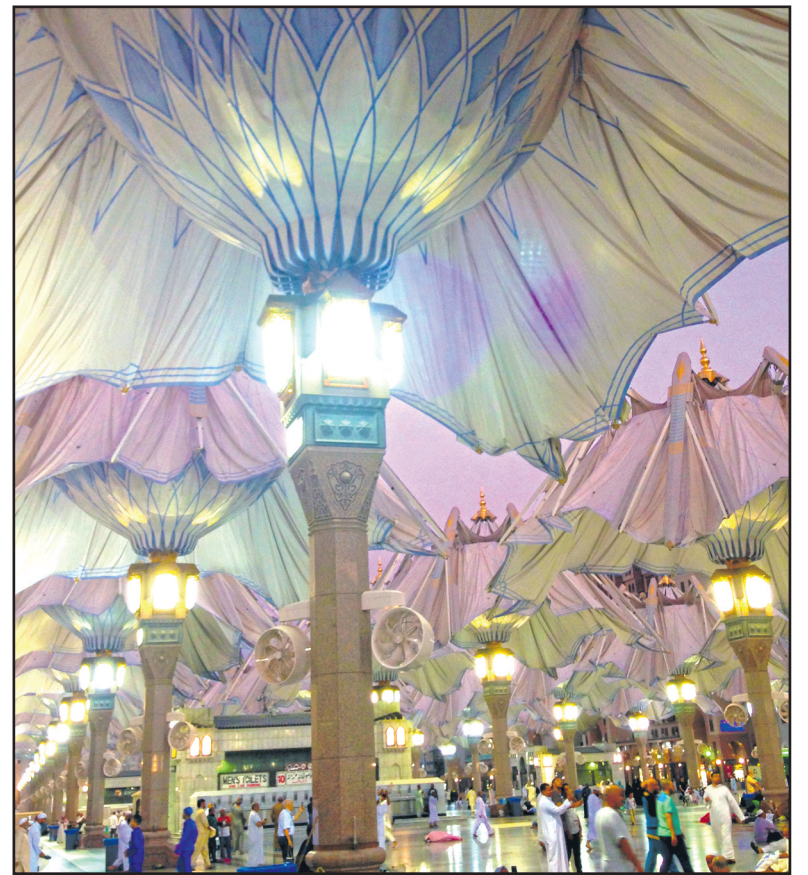
'No Aunt, I am blessed to be accompanying you,' he instinctively replied. He then realised that he had to go.

Abdullah was always an independent person. He meticulously sorted out his finances and ensured that all his debts were settled and that he had more than sufficient funds for the journey as well as for any emergencies. He also had his contingency sum set aside for all types of presents that his family might request while he was in the Holy Land.

He knew that the many well-wishers who would visit him before his departure would inevitably slip an envelope containing some money in his hand or pocket with their final greeting. He resolved that he would not use a cent of this money for himself or his family. He made a resolution that all that money would be dispensed to the needy and poor when he was in Makkah and Madinah.

Abdullah was a kind and humble man, a fact that he did not realise but the rest of the world did. They showed their gratitude, and he was shocked when he diligently counted the gifted money the evening before his departure: it was close to the entire cost of his journey.

Ahmed learnt everything about the Hajj in the two months prior to his departure. He had to make hasty arrangements with his employer, who nearly terminated his services due to what they perceived unreasonable and excessive leave demands. They agreed to unpaid leave and this aggravated his already woeful financial circumstances. He had recently bought a souped-up vehicle whose thirsty



Sometimes, just as it takes a while for the umbrellas that provide shade to open, it can take time for the benefit of the journey of Hajj to be appreciated.

Photo SALIM PARKER

engine whizzed through his wallet, and he sat with other huge, self-inflicted debts.

His aunt visited him one day. 'It has always been my intention to take you along with not a single financial obligation. I have already paid for our full packages. You do not have to worry about anything,' she informed him.

He was close to tears and very emotionally informed her that he was selling his car. She was aware that it was his pride and joy and his status symbol amongst his friends. 'Please don't do that,' she said.

'I want to; Hajj is a much more important journey than anything those four wheels can take me on,' he replied.

Abdullah and Ahmed were travelling with different Hajj groups but were on the same flight from South Africa.

The groups first went to the City of Light, the City of Peace, Madinah, and were accommodated in the same hotel. Ahmed noted Abdullah coughing at the breakfast venue one morning. 'That elderly man does not look well, and seems all alone,' Ahmed's aunt observed.

He went to Abdullah and asked him if he needed any help, and the offer was politely declined. He did not see Abdullah the next day and enquired about his whereabouts from the group leader, who was clueless but gave him Abdullah's room number. Ahmed went to check up on him and found him all alone, sweating profusely and breathing with difficulty.

Ahmed knew that I was travelling with his group and hastily urged me to attend to Abdullah. I obliged.

Abdullah was in tears. 'I had everything perfectly planned. I was supposed to be greeting the Prophet (SAW) this morning and here I cannot even get out of bed,' he said. After I examined him, I reassured him that he merely had an infection which would resolve soon.

'Hajj is still more than a month away and it is infinitely better to

be sick now than during the five days of Hajj,' I said.

'But I had all these plans, Doc!' he said. He then explained his detailed itinerary for each day. This included giving money to a needy person each day. The money he had been gifted by family and friends was divided into daily aliquots and neatly wrapped into individual packets. 'Do you need money to buy medicines for the hujjaaj?' he asked me. I politely indicated that we had enough medication.

Ahmed had tears in his eyes. 'What's wrong?' I asked. He explained that he had sold his car and intended to donate a portion of that money to the poor in the holy cities.

'I initially did not want to come for Hajj because I was not spiritually and financially prepared but now I am so glad that I have accepted the invitation. Uncle Abdullah, I will distribute your money along with mine today and the days that you cannot do so. Once you are well we can do it together,' he offered.

This gesture was readily accepted. I later walked with Ahmed to the Prophet's (SAW) Mosque. Even the huge crowds could not distract from the serenity of the most peaceful city on this planet. After prayers, he met with a South African resident in Madinah who took him to some desperately poor locals.

Abdullah was up and about the next morning, attributing his rapid recovery to the 'good doctor' but I knew that it was the peace of mind that played a significant part. I noticed him sitting at Ahmed's table and they clearly had found something in common.

Hajj was still some time away. Their Hajj had already started and, somehow, though they had started from vastly different origins, they had reached the uniform path of generosity and contentment. They had indeed arrived. Labaik!

*Not their real names

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

If we look, there will always be light
Photo SALIM PARKER

