

HAJJ STORIES

WHOSE HAPPINESS COUNTS?

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'I am going to stand on Arafat and ask Allah that she'll take me back,' he told me. He was divorced for about three years. Life has not turned out the way he envisaged and there were plenty of low points. Some were just due to chance, like the time when he opened a store only to find out that a large competing franchise was to open soon right opposite him. As soon as this happened, his business folded. However other events, by his own admission, could have been avoided or were self-inflicted. 'Hajj will make everything right,' he told me. 'I'll be a changed person. I'll make all my prayers on time, I'll not get angry, I'll be as good as is humanly possible,' he blurted. 'She will see that I am a changed person and insha-Allah, we'll start afresh,' he added. 'If only it was so straightforward,' I thought.

'Allah has planned your happiness, maybe in ways that you did not anticipate.'

I first met him in Madinah when he consulted me about his medical condition. In the calm and serene atmosphere of the City of Peace he spoke easily. He mentioned his previous drug addiction. How it made him a monster. He admitted to physically assaulting his ex-wife and mentally torturing her. She did not just leave an abusive marriage. No, she fled from a demon from whom more demons were being unleashed. In his warped mindset he of course denied her a divorce, and she had to embark on applying for it at her religious body. Excruciatingly painful and laborious would be an understatement for her quest, but she finally succeeded. But that was just one part of her struggle. He was infuriated and, in his drug-induced state, he continued his assaults. He would rock up at her work hurling verbal abuse. It took several court interdicts and a spell in jail for it to stop.

His spell behind bars changed him. It permanently locked away his cravings for drugs and led to a complete rehabilitation and the emergence of a God-fearing person who developed insight into where he transgressed. It also led to clear-cut goals. He studied his religion, improved his academic qualifications, got involved in social projects and was able to fully integrate into society. He spoke openly about his previous issues so that others may benefit from it. 'It is never too late to change,' was his moto. He set himself clear goals and worked slavishly in order to achieve it. There was one goal he dearly wanted to achieve and that was to reconcile with his ex-wife. I could never establish whether it was out of love or guilt or both. What was evident was that everything he was doing was to achieve it. Soon it was apparent that it was not just a desire. It was an obsession.

Another fixation he had was that Hajj would change everything. That life would automatically be good. That all prayers and wishes will come true. All endeavors will be successful. 'I have been making Duaa for the liberation of Palestine every time I stood on the plains of Arafat for the last twenty years,' I once told him. 'Allah will grant it soon,' he replied dismissively, as it was clearly not in the field of his vision. 'I just want to be happy, and want her to be part of that happiness,' he said. 'What if she did not want to be part of your happiness?' I asked him. He seemed dumbstruck. It never occurred to him that she may not want to be part of his life ever again. They had no children, and she left every conceivable material possession behind except the clothes she was wearing when she fled. Even that she burnt afterwards.

I have heard from other pilgrims that she was to get married in a few months. 'Has she moved on with her life?' I asked him. 'She received a proposal,' he replied. So, he was aware. 'If she has accepted then is it right for you to intercede?' I asked. 'I'll ask Allah on Arafat to make us all happy,' he replied. 'What if Allah wants both of you to be happy, but not with each other?' I gently probed. I reflected that our Deen permits divorce if needed, recognizing that some marriages are toxic, incompatible, detrimental to those involved or unsustainable. It beseeches that the parties involved separate on peaceful terms when terminating a relationship. 'What if Allah decrees that your happiness is with someone else, and her happiness with the person who proposed to her?' I continued. He did not respond at all to my questions. 'My Duaas are sincere,' was all he said.

One of the group leaders who knew them both informed me that the lady was institutionalized for months after her divorce. She moved to another city

And any mention of him led to a panic attack. It appeared that she was permanently scarred and scared. Yet life smiled on her. Her talents and resilience were recognized, and she landed a high-profile job. She also met, by all accounts, an amazing person who idolized her and whom she could see herself finding happiness with. He was aware of her past and he and his family approached her with a marriage proposal which she accepted. She was happy. Happy with her ex-husband out of her life. There was no place for him in her future. He was building his future happiness by wriggling himself back into her established serenity. It appeared that he was going to use his presence on Arafat to justify his intentions.



Dr Salim Parker

I intended to ask one of the learned scholars to chat to him before Hajj but somehow this never materialized. I wanted him to realise that Arafat was being as close to our Creator as possible. It was about knowing that our lives trials, rewards and happiness are at the will of Allah and is not an earthly action and reaction trade-off. Sometimes all good deeds remain rewardless on earth. We then have to remember that Jannah is waiting. Other times unpunished earthly sins merely await the opening of the gates leading the perpetrator to be consumed by fire. I had all these thoughts flashing through my mind. The horror of him in his mistaken quest for his happiness obliterating her future seemed real.

I saw him on the first day of Hajj on Mina. He had a high fever and was quite weak and unwell. I treated him but he was clearly not in a state to involve in serious discussions about his future. He needed wheelchair assistance the next morning when we left for Arafat, and by midday he felt slightly better but unable to stand for any significant period. 'This is not how I planned spending Wuqoof time,' he lamented when I checked up on him. 'Allah is the best of planners,' I replied. 'Allah has planned your happiness, maybe in ways that you did not anticipate. Accept and embrace it,' I added. He did not reply, instead he lay down and fell asleep.

I heard about a year later that he got married. She also got betrothed. Just not to each other.



Not all Duaas made on Arafat are accepted.