

HAJJ STORIES

HAJJ, WITH BENEFITS

NOVEMBER 2025

He felt obliged to repay me in some way. I assured him that it was not necessary. For me it was part of my daily work. Of course, remembering me in his Duaas would be appreciated. But no, no compensation was ever necessary. I was accompanying a group of close to a thousand Hujaaj on Hajj as a doctor. Most of our cases we encountered were routine respiratory infections and the optimal management of underlying medical conditions. We had a number of elderly travellers, and some had complex medical problems that were aggravated by the heat, changes in sleeping patterns, increased physical activity, changes in daily routine, and the unfamiliar, at times bewildering, environment. Add to that the real possibility of misplacing or losing medication, forgetting to take medication in all the excitement, and we have a myriad ways of encountering potential medical disasters. His was just one of those intriguing cases.

He consulted me about a week before the first day of Hajj. Our group had just moved from Makkah to the suburb of Aziziyah and his room happened to be on the same floor as my consulting room. He was clearly not happy with his assigned room and was confronting the agent about it. I happened to walk past the two arguing on my way to my room after the midday prayers when I noticed his incessant coughing and evident wheeze. 'You are welcome to come to see me in my room so that I can attend to your chest problem,' was the invitation to him. 'I am just upset,' he hissed back. I retreated to my

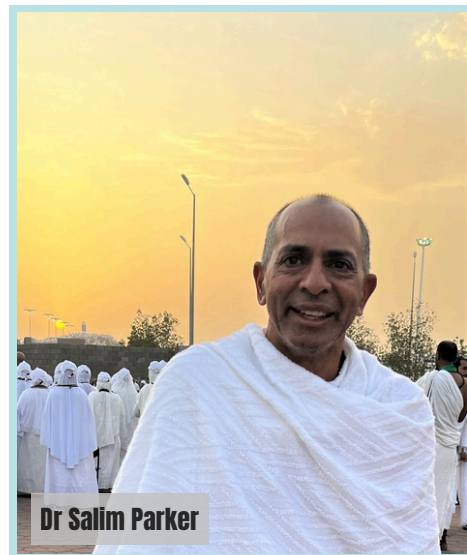
room and started seeing patients who were already waiting there. We could hear his raised voice on a few occasions but after about an hour, matters seemed to have resolved and there were no more slanging matches.

'I must be on Arafat for Hajj; I cannot miss my Hajj'

I had a busy afternoon and was seeing my last few patients before the sunset prayer when he walked into the surgery. I was examining a patient in a partitioned off area, but his wheezing and very rapid breathing was very, very audible. It sounded like he was distressed. A colleague who happened to just have collected medication attended to him and immediately called me. We nebulized him, gave him some injections, put up a drip, and tried to stabilize him. He apologised profusely all the time, indicating that we should see the patients who were there already. We tried to calm him, and the patients assured him that they were fine with him being seen first. We entered the waqt of Maghrib and I advised the others to go to mosque. I would see to them afterwards. I stayed with him, but he was not improving.

He kept apologising. For being obnoxious in the passage, for jumping the queue, for preventing me from going to mosque. I told him that he has pneumonia and needed to be hospitalised. He started panicking. 'I must be on Arafat for Hajj, I cannot miss my Hajj!' he cried. I reassured him. All that was needed was an x-ray of his chest, antibiotics through a drip for a few days, and he'll be all set to go. I addressed his smoking addiction after he admitted that he smoked up to forty a day. We had him admitted an hour later and visited him daily until his discharge four days later. 'See, Hajj only begins in three days and you puffing away merrily.' I said when I unexpectedly went to the roof of our building where he and a few other pilgrims were succumbing to their addiction to one of the leading causes of death on this planet.

He pledged there and then that he would stop smoking when he put on his Ihram for Hajj. He kept to his pledge, not to me or to himself, but to his Creator. He looked for me on Arafat and could not thank me enough for what he considered saving his life. I again explained to him that any other doctor would have been able to diagnose his condition as he was so severely sick. Luckily it was an eminently treatable condition. 'Once we get home, I'll contact Doc to see how I can at least repay your life saving intervention,' he again said. Hajj was an eye opener for him. He was an extremely wealthy person, with his life and time fully committed to his multiple



Dr Salim Parker

businesses. He savoured the time during his pilgrimage when he had no idea whether the person standing next to him was a business tycoon, an academic or a content labourer.

He lived in a different town to me. I received phone call from him a few days after Hajj. 'I still owe you,' he laughed. 'But seriously Doc, one of my companies sells products that I know you use in your practice. Whatever price you pay for it at the moment, be assured that I can undercut it. Please let me know what you are paying currently,' he added. I sent him our acquisition prices of the products in question a few days later and within thirty minutes received a quote that was nearly half of the usual price. Our practice thought we scored big and we probably would have. However, in life, price is not the only determinant of business allegiances and the developments over the next few days taught me that no matter how good people's intentions were, a holistic approach needs to be adopted.

We informed our current supplier that we would no longer be using their product. The lady owner called me the next day, humbly asking if she could meet with our practice for a few minutes. Her company has supplied us for more than twenty years, but I had never met her. She came to our rooms the next day. 'I cannot match the prices that you have been given,' she said. She showed us a file indicating that her cost was way more than our new offer. 'You are our biggest customer and we would not like to lose you after so many years. But we will be facing financial ruin if we go anywhere close to the price you have been offered,' she added. We chatted a bit and she spoke, amongst other things, of her two children who she was struggling to put through university. I promised to call her within a few days.

I had a long chat with my wealthy new Hajjie friend that evening. Yes, his price will stand as long as he owns the company. When I asked him whether he would be making a loss, he laughed and said I must not worry. But I was worried. I gently explained to him the situation of my current supplier and indicated that we unfortunately would not be taking up his offer. He understood. 'Is there any way I can assist you in whatever project?' he asked. 'Do you know of any bursary funds?' I enquired. It transpired that his companies had more than one such fund. 'Would you consider funding two deserving university students?' was my request. His reply? 'Consider it done.'



New bonds are formed during Hajj