

HAJJ STORIES

HAJJ: CONTINUE THE DREAM

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'Daddy! I had a wonderful dream last night!' she said. Ali* listened attentively to his daughter, Fatima*. What was this dream all about?' he asked. His daughter, who taught at a local Islamic facility, started explaining her dream. 'In my dream Uncle Amir* was standing in our lounge with his wife. He was super excited and could hardly contain himself. He had just come from his house after being on his computer for quite some time. He came with the greatest news that any Muslim could wish for,' she said. Ali and Amir were the best of friends. It was natural that they would apply to perform Hajj together, with their spouses of course. It was a transitional year, where all applications were done online. 'Uncle Amir and his wife were accepted to perform Hajj!' his daughter continued. 'That is wonderful!' Ali said. He then gave it some more thought. 'What about me and Mom?' he asked. 'Nothing Dad,' she replied.

Fatima taught at the same place as Amir's wife. She related her dream to her and she in turn conveyed it to Amir later that day. Amir went to visit his friend, and they chatted about Fatima's dream. They were standing in the lounge. 'Do you realise that we are standing in exactly the same spot that Fatima described so vividly in her dream?' Ali asked Amir. They spoke about the irony of Amir's good news, even though in a dream, being revealed in Ali's house, with the latter totally in the dark about his prospects to embark on the Holy Journey. In instances like these I am sure that Amir probably reiterated that it was a dream, and nothing more than that. The friends spoke about hopefully travelling together still as Hajj was still a few months away and no one actually knew who would be blessed to go.

The application process was quite tedious for the uninitiated. It was the first year that South Africans had to apply online exclusively to perform Hajj. A sequence of events had to be followed with first an applicant registering, then wait to be verified. This was followed more than a month later for packages to be published online which applicant then had to choose. Some time later they had to deposit money in a virtual wallet and about a month later they had to bid, together with thousands of others, for their package, at a specified time. South Africa had an allocation of just over one thousand one hundred pilgrims. The bidding was in effect a lottery. Whoever got through first, irrespective of whether they had performed twenty times or never ever, would get a package provided they had enough money in their wallet to pay.

On the day of the sale both of them were sitting in front of their computers in their respective

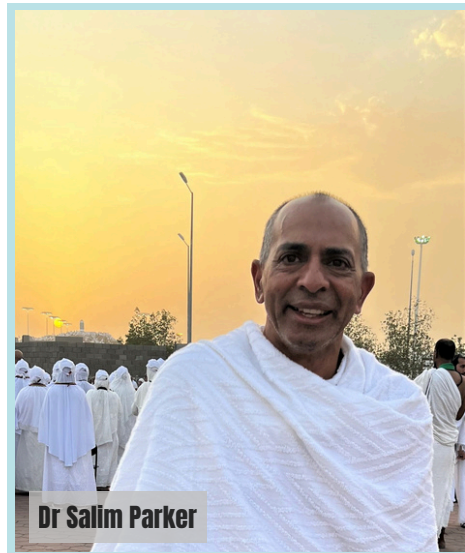
houses. The system allows couples to link under one application, so both husband and wife will 'get approved or neither will. The system will not approve one spouse and not the other. The online system had initial teething problems when the sale started at the specified times. Some applicants got messages that they would be able to bid in an hour's time, whilst others were informed that they will enter the bidding process with a few hours. Some even got messages that their projected bidding time was after Hajj! I know of many who were absolutely exasperated with what was unfolding and were on the verge of simply quitting. It was only the realisation that they were attempting to embark on the journey of a lifetime that spurred them to persevere.

'The dream was true but needed to be completed'

Amir, as most others, struggled initially. He was aware that success mathematically was probably ten percent, assuming that ten thousand South Africans were bidding for the one thousand one hundred spots. Then the system opened for him. He could not believe it! He nervously proceeded. Payment was requested and he transferred the funds from his online wallet to the payment link. Success! He was still nervous. An accepted payment did not guarantee that he and his wife would be granted visas. He followed all the prompts. Then the message appeared that they were waiting for. He checked his e-mails. There was a confirmation that their application was successful. There were even flight confirmations! Further details were to follow. They looked at what these details were to be. Confirmation on the system would be the clincher. What felt like an eternity followed whilst they waited. And waited. Finally, all was confirmed. They were going on Hajj!

The two friends contacted each other. Of course Ali was happy for his friend. Ali however did not get anywhere on his numerous attempts to purchase a package. Thinking about it, the chances of two friends living close to each other bidding for the same lottery have a very remote chance of both succeeding. The reality always was there that only one would be successful. But as friends they made Duaa that both couples would indeed simultaneously stand on Arafat. 'Wait a bit, I'll be there now,' Amir informed his friend. He and his wife rushed over to Ali's house. They stood in the lounge, just as in the dream. Amir was successful, just as in the dream. Nothing was revealed in the dream about Ali. Neither failure, nor success. The dream was true but needed to be completed. What followed was more than a dream.

Amir joined Ali at his computer. The sale was still active, and the one watched the other trying again. Suddenly a prompt appeared. 'Buy a package.' it

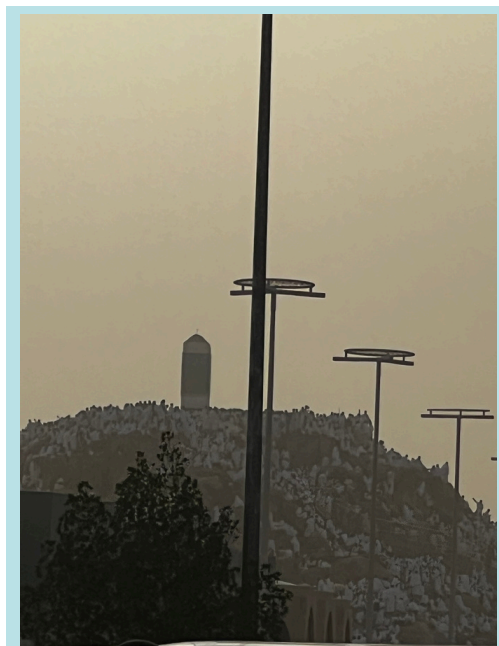


Dr Salim Parker

indicated. Filled with trepidation, Ali filled in the fields on his computer. 'Pay now,' came the next instruction and Ali dutifully complied. The rest of the events seemed like a blur. His payment was successful, the screen showed more prompts, and they mechanically did exactly what was required. Waiting for e-mails, waiting for confirmation, making sure that they did not misunderstand anything or pressed the wrong buttons took forever. It was certainly worth it. 'Success!' was the message that flashed onto his screen. The dream was now complete.

They were all elated. They were again in the lounge. Just as Fatima described. Amir and his wife were there. Exactly as she explained it. Fatima looked at Amir's wife. 'You are wearing the exact same dress that I saw in my dream!' she exclaimed. The sequence of events was just unbelievable. Even when Ali described it to me when they came for their travel vaccines. It was very evident that they believed in the power of faith. Ali also was not worried when he was not given the news he was hoping for, even in a dream. He just was happy that his friend had an early positive sign. Positivity breeds positivity. As a friend of mine always says: 'Believe and have faith, make Duaa, and the rewards will inevitably flow'.

*Not real names



The greatest dream of any Muslim: on Arafat at Wuqoof