

HAJJ STORIES

CAN HAJJ HEAL SHATTERED SOULS?

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'I have seen the worst of mankind,' he told me. He was a doctor working in a war-torn country. He dealt with the most horrendous injuries imaginable, from young children with eyes gouged out to adults whose limbs were severed by machetes. 'It is man disfiguring fellow human beings, Muslims killing fellow Muslims, previous neighbours maiming each other,' he continued. Tears were evident. We were sitting on the top floor of the Haram. I was sitting there alone a few moments earlier, watching the crowds on the Mataaf circumambulating the Ka'ba, celebrating the longest continuous expression of peace on this earth. I had my small backpack with me, and my stethoscope was protruding through the opening. Perhaps that is what he noticed when he sat down next to me and began to converse. After trying to ascertain my nationality through a few rudimentary questions in Arabic, I informed him of my South African identity and that I was indeed a doctor.

'Our Duaas may not necessarily be answered immediately'

We initially chatted about our work, and very soon he started recollecting his harrowing experiences. Initially, I thought that he just needed to chat, to de-stress, and to let all his anger, frustration, sorrow, and inner feelings out. Sometimes it can be part of a healing process, helping the sufferer to know that others are aware of their feelings and experiences. He, however, had a strange monotone and affect. I never doubted that he was telling the truth; his description of events and terminology was too precise. His passion for his work was evident, and the skill set that he described to carry out some of the procedures would have been an asset in any country. I was sure several countries would have welcomed him with open arms, and he could have practiced in a safe environment. Yet he chose to stay in a war-ravaged country. A true patriot? Maybe not, I realised.

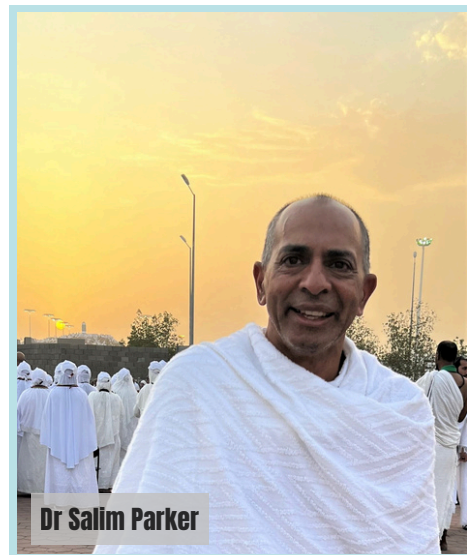
I'll never know if his choice of words was merely coincidental. Or whether it was a cry for help initially. He spoke of how some men, and yes, it is mostly men, are addicted to power. Others are addicted to gathering more and more wealth, no matter how much they have already amassed. The subject then changed to the more macabre, how some are addicted to torturing and maiming their victims. War also glaringly exposes the butchers who are addicted to killing. 'Maybe he drew immense fulfillment in helping the truly helpless victims of atrocities,' I thought. Whilst he was speaking, I observed a group of Indonesians in Ihram entering onto the Mataaf, ready to start their Tawaaf, their national flag proudly on display. Some tone in his voice made me look at him. His eyes revealed all. 'You are a drug addict,' I said.

Hajj draws Muslims from all walks of life. Who are we to judge any pilgrim's past? Only our Creator will decide on the Day of Arafat how sincerely a pilgrim repents past transgressions and how dedicated they are to right past wrongs. Past dictators donned Ihram, and some were reported to have led virtuous and pious lives. Our transgressions seem to be minuscule compared to atrocities that notorious barbarians have committed, but we still have to be acutely aware of them. He lowered his gaze. At that time I had been a doctor for more than twenty years in one of Cape Town's most drug-infested suburbs. I knew the signs and symptoms. And he had consumed it recently. Very, very recently. I did not even know his name. I only knew him as a doctor from a certain country. I was pretty certain that he used a high-end narcotic that would result in his execution if he was caught.

He did not contest my assertion. 'What would you do to stem the pain?' he asked. That was not for me to debate as, no matter how much as could possibly envisage his situation, I could never claim that I would have the answers. Instead, I tried to adhere to logical and practical reasoning. Yes, there is a mantra that a drug addict who does not want to be helped is not going to be persuaded to go for rehabilitation, but his life was in danger in this situation. 'You know Saudi Arabia has very strict narcotic rules,' I said. He started crying. 'Make your Niyah now to stop,' I suddenly advised. 'In fact, make all your intentions now. Do you have Wudu currently?' I asked. He replied in the affirmative. 'Let us perform a Tawaaf here on the roof,' I suggested. He obliged.

We walked and walked. Two doctors similar in profession but worlds apart in lived experience. I, having a relatively sheltered life, blessed with enormous privileges. He, shattered by man's inhumanity, desperately trying to piece together some semblance of humanity onto the shattered fragments of destroyed dreams. He recounted peaceful villages transformed into hellish prisons from where death was a welcome escape. Then we spoke about Hajj. He never admitted to any drug problem but kept alluding to being a changed person by the time of Wuqoof. The first day was a mere seventy-two hours away. Clinically, there was not enough time to be rehabilitated. Withdrawal symptoms would set in within a specific time. I knew he either had some stocks piled away or had access to it. Multiple scenarios played themselves out in my head. Some miraculous, some practical and sobering, and others very negative. Truth be told, I could not foresee him being 'clean' on Arafat.

'Let me recount an incident,' I told him. 'I had a couple a few years ago where the husband physically abused his wife, even after Arafat. They were in Azizyah a few hours after pelting Aqaba on the third day of the pilgrimage when those not on Hajj celebrated Eid. One of my colleagues attended to



Dr Salim Parker

her. On the last day of Hajj, we all went to pelt the Jamarats and the husband slipped and lay helpless amongst the surging crowd. His wife, without hesitation, leaned over him, affording some protection and whispering words of comfort whilst also making Duaa. She did this until some of us could rally around him and help him back onto his feet and into the safety of our group. He was a changed man after that, viewing her as a polished diamond and not like some mud-covered stone. He was on Arafat, he stood at the time of Wuqoof reaching out to his Creator, but, in his own words, his life changed permanently after the falling incident,' I continued.

'What are you saying?' he asked. 'Today, in fact right now, is the start of your new life,' I responded. We had finished our Tawaaf and walked past a group sitting and praying. A young child stood up, approached us with a big smile, and offered us Zamzam and dates. 'Let us be on Arafat, which will be the closest that we'll ever be to our Creator. Let us make our Duaas from now till then and thereafter. Our Duaas may not necessarily be answered immediately, but they will be recorded, and Allah will act on them at the right time. Do not wait till Wuqoof, start right now,' I advised.

We prayed our required two Rakats salah immediately after our chat. We both stepped towards an open spot from where we could see the Ka'ba. I closed my eyes for a short period whilst making Duaa. When I was done, I looked around but did not see him. He was gone. I estimated that we were in each company for just over an hour. More than ten years later it feels like we just finished our chat. Till this day I sincerely make Duaa that our Hajj that year was indeed his Arafat.



Who knows who will stand next to you whilst looking at the Ka'ba