

HAJJ STORIES

WAITING FOR THE RIGHT TIME

MAY 2026

'Where is your wife?' I asked.

He came to see me in Madinah two days after arrival. Hajj was still a month away. He was exhausted, feverish, had a sore throat, and was coughing. It was a typical presentation—one I had anticipated. Our Cape Town pilgrims have a predictably disrupted week before departure. They are deprived of sleep by well-wishers who, despite the best of intentions, overstay their visits until well past midnight and sometimes even remain until sunrise the next morning. They then face the anxiety of departing from airports crowded with even more family and friends, all frantically attempting to bid one final farewell. Upon arriving in a foreign country, they encounter further strain during customs clearance and transfer to their hotels. Awaiting them are several eager germs, gleefully pouncing on susceptible pilgrims whose immunity has now been compromised. He was, unfortunately, one of those who fell prey to these fiends and came to see me.

'Any time to visit the resting place of the Noblest Human Being is always the right time.'

I first met him about three months earlier when I gave a talk on the medical aspects of Hajj at a pilgrim orientation programme. He was extremely excited about being accredited for this remarkable journey. His wife was with him, but she was strangely subdued. She showed profound disinterest in all his enthusiastic questions, and it soon became evident that he felt uncomfortable. He stopped interacting, and they left shortly afterwards, unlike most attendees who bombarded the agents and vendors with questions. He visited my rooms a few weeks later for his vaccines. This time, he was not his usual bundle of energy. It was a very workmanlike interaction, almost like a scripted question-and-answer session. He was alone. When I asked about his wife, he responded that she was busy and unable to accompany him.

Now, here in the City of Peace, he was alone again.

'She is not accompanying me on this journey,' he said. His demeanour reflected obvious dejection. I knew they had both been accredited, and it is almost unheard of for Cape Town couples not to undertake this journey together. 'I hope she is well,' I replied. In situations like these, I normally avoid probing questions and leave it to the individual to continue if they wish. He struggled to speak. His eyes welled with tears. Many patients were still waiting for me, and it was nearly time for the Thuhr prayer. We were staying in the same hotel, and I politely asked whether he would like to have lunch with me. He noted that we would not have much time to talk then and nodded in the affirmative.

I managed to finish just before the Athan magnetically called me to the Prophet's Mosque. As I exited the hotel en route to the Mosque, I saw him standing outside. 'May I walk with you?' he asked. 'Of course,' I replied, and we made our way to the most peaceful sanctuary on this planet. Madinah was busy, but never too busy. Even when rushing, there was time to pause and reflect. Even when being shunted from one gate to another, serenity and harmony enveloped all who allowed themselves to be embraced by it. After the prayer, I suggested that we greet our Beloved Prophet (SAW).

'Do you have time?' he asked. 'There is always time. Any time to visit the resting place of the Noblest Human Being is always the right time,' I smiled. As we walked with the crowds, it was clear that we were part of one Ummah, not competitors against one another. 'It is the right time for me to be here. It is just not the right time for us to be here together,' he said, clearly referring to his spouse.

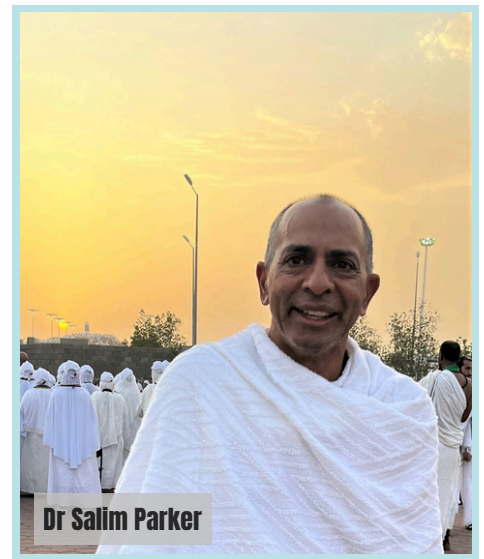
As we walked back to our hotel, his story unfolded. His wife was simply not ready for this journey.

Financially, yes, as he had saved for it over time—but not spiritually or emotionally. Initially, she expressed concern about the children, even though extended family members were already falling over themselves to care for their two teenagers. Then she mentioned difficulties obtaining leave, although her Muslim employer was ecstatic about her accreditation and willing to grant her additional paid leave.

Finally, one evening, after persistently urging him not to confirm their flights, she broke down. Her heart was simply not in it. No, she had no worldly desires such as extravagant island holidays. She was a devout practising Muslim who reprimanded him whenever he remained glued to the television during international soccer matches while the Athan for Maghrib called him to prepare to lead her in prayer.

'I just do not understand her,' he said. 'She serves on Muslim volunteer bodies, occasionally teaches at a madrasa, and cannot be faulted in her belief or practice of Deen. Her influence led to two of her friends embracing Islam and others rediscovering the inner spirituality of our religion. Yet when it came to Hajj, she was not ready.' He spoke with bitterness and added that, since his elderly parents were committed to the journey, he had decided to accompany them. 'My parents have never been an issue. In fact, it often appears that she loves them more than she loves me. I have been ready forever and was not going to miss this opportunity,' he said.

I listened and must confess that, based on what he told me, I could understand his confusion. But I also know that Allah has reasons for how time unfolds. 'Perhaps her time will still come,' was all I could offer. He visited me several times over the next two weeks.



Dr Salim Parker

About a week before Hajj, he anxiously pleaded to see me urgently. It was late evening, and we were due to leave Makkah for Aziziyah the next day.

'My wife has cancer, and she never told me,' he cried. She had been diagnosed around the time they were accredited and had been informed that delaying treatment would likely allow irreversible spread. In contrast, early treatment carried a high chance of remission. She consulted her Sheikh at the time of diagnosis, who advised her that preserving her life took precedence over Hajj. She did not want her husband or his parents to postpone their journey and therefore maintained the charade of simply not being ready. 'Let us perform Tawaaf and pray for her complete cure,' I suggested. He agreed. He cried. Cries of sorrow as he could not be home to support her. Cries of feeling blessed because he was in the best possible place to make Du'aa for her.

'It is our time now,' he smiled two years later, about a week before Hajj. He and his wife, accompanied by me, were re-enacting the Tawaaf we had performed for her health. This time, we were thanking our Creator that her recovery was complete and that she was in remission. Because she had postponed her pilgrimage previously, the operational system now permitted him to accompany her as her mahram.

I reminded him how we had all prayed on Arafat two years earlier for her recovery. 'Did you make Du'aa on Arafat that one day she would stand there with you?' I asked. 'I made so much Du'aa then that I cannot even remember everything I asked for,' he confessed. 'Now I know exactly what is in my heart.' He smiled. She smiled. We all smiled. Her time had come. Their time together had come. 'Labbaik!'



Together on Hajj this time.