

# Hajj Stories

## Shades of Light

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### Dr Salim Parker

Adam\* always dreads the onset of the night. He was always scared of what devilish details the darkness will unveil. Since childhood he surrounded himself with light and had a sibling sharing a room. His bed lamp was always dimly lit, but definitely on shying away demons. During the last few years he slept with his earphones plugged in so that the unexpected screeches of hideous creatures of the night are filtered out. He was in his late twenties and still single when he decided to perform Hajj after a friend of his performed it a few years earlier. He attended Hajj classes and was confident that even though he did not know any of his group's fellow pilgrims that the most important journey in the life of a Muslim would indeed be his journey of a lifetime. He did not indicate any preferences to the travel agent about roommates except that they should not smoke. Initially in Madinah and Makkah he was to share a room with a fellow pilgrim whilst later in Azizya there was going to be four in a room.

Zane\* never was comfortable in crowds. He was also young and when his sister and her husband made Niyah to perform Hajj, he instinctively decided to join

them. Before Hajj he spoke to me about the palpitations he experienced when amongst large numbers of people and the extreme comfort he feels when he retreated to the sanctuary of his room at night. Between his own four walls in the pitch darkness of the middle of the night, with his heavy curtains drawn closed cementing out all light and his double-glazed windows shielding against all sound, he was at ease. This was his solace and refuge from the outside and here he felt safe and secure. He tried medication on a few occasions but indicated that for this particular journey he wants to experience what his Creator had set out for him. He booked the same package as Adam and only indicated that any roommate should not be a smoker. It seemed that an immovable object was going to face an irresistible force. Or would fate somehow destine that their plights about light would ignite the most wonderful journey?

Adam travelled with great enthusiasm and easily made friends. As he was travelling without any family, he availed any assistance he could render such as helping wheelchair bound pilgrims move around. By the time he reached Madinah many in the group had prospective Cape Town soulmates in mind for him! Adam was so busy interacting with others that he unexpectedly felt relieved when he could just relax in his reclined plane seat and doze off. Zane had a window seat on his flights and buried himself in watching movies or listening to Quranic recitations. On a few occasions he chatted to his sister who was seated behind him and did not speak a word to the person seated next to him. He did initially contemplate flying business class so that he would not have to be cramped with most other pilgrims in cattle class, but the price was way beyond his reach. He kept thinking of the tranquility that everyone told him Madinah would gently envelop him in and strangely he was not as claustrophobic as he anticipated.

Adam and Zane were allocated to share a room in Madinah. They arrived late at night and Zane's first thought was to have a shower and sleep. Adam however could not contain his excitement and enthusiastically indicated that he was going to the Mosque of his Beloved Prophet

(SAW). They were allocated a room with a view of the Haram. 'It looks so peaceful and quite there,' Zane thought. The South Africans were of the first to arrive for the Hajj season and the City of Tranquility was indeed relatively empty. The two of them made their way down. Adam was not intimidated by the

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quietness and the few people around him. Instead, he felt privileged that there were no masses crowds and that they could, after performing their obligatory prayers, make their way to the grave of Muhammed (SAW). There were a number of people jostling to greet there but Zane felt no pressure and felt enormously blessed just to be there.

They did not leave until the morning prayers were completed. After a quick breakfast, they both fell into a deep sleep brought about by their exhaustive journey. Zane woke up just before midday. Through the window he could see a lot of activity but the soundproofing led to an eerie silence. 'This is not right,' he thought. He woke up Adam, who dreamily got up and also looked out of the window. He was still tired and enjoyed the simultaneous silence of the room and flurry of activity on the ground. Zane opened the window and they both just looked at their fellow pilgrims making their way to the Haram. There was now synergistic harmony between the different senses.

As the days passed in Madinah they each learnt in their own way how to deal with their insecurities. Adam thrived in the sanctuary that the large expanses of the Prophet's Mosque offered. He realised that he was not afraid of the vast empty spaces, he was scared of being alone in those endless horizons. Now he had his prayer books, the rich history of our Deen and the uplifting spirituality that can only be found in Madinah. Zane discovered the richness of diversity of those around him and initially he

chatted to one or two foreigners but soon engaged in group activities. His sister at one stage remarked that he spent more time with others than with her! Adam and Zane also early on developed a deep friendship and more importantly started talking about themselves to each other. Childhood and teenage events and

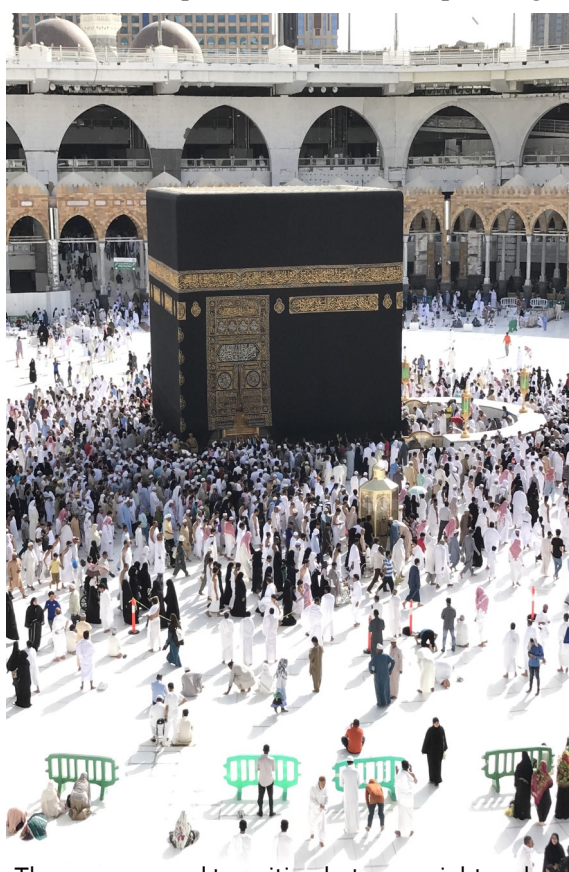
insecurities came to the fore and they discussed it intensely. They were not trained medical professionals but they in effect became each other's path out of their own unique fragile psychological maze.

Madinah changed the different ways they perceived the light around them. Their life revolved around the five daily prayers and the time they could spend in the Haram. Adam found himself and he could just as easily walk alone to the mosque or walk with Zane or with a group. Zane returned the smile of others' welcome, embraced the warmth radiating from fellow pilgrims and never even missed the solitude of his room. They were truly travellers on a road which was only going to reveal the wonders of brotherhood. It could only get better.

Makkah was a completely different experience for the two of them. The crowds did not bother Zane at all and Adam on at least one occasion sought the refuge of his room. When they moved to Azizyah their infectious spirit touched the other two roommates. There was no real transition between night and day. Life revolved around prayers and preparing for the five days of Hajj. Adam and Zane both had seamlessly moved out of their own manifest darkness and were embraced by their own special luminance. No medical intervention was needed, no psychological counselling. All that was required was the tranquility of Madinah, being overwhelmed by Makkah and finally the ultimate radiance of Arafat.

\*Names were changed.

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