

# HAJJ STORIES

## ETCHED IN MEMORIES

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'My God is infinitely merciful. Love, compassion, and forgiveness are the embodiment of my Prophet Mohammed (SAW). My friend's God is one of punishment and this friend speaks frequently of how hot hell is and the different sentences there are for various misdemeanors and transgressions. His example of his Prophet Mohammed (SAW) is one of being a conqueror expanding an empire. The irony is that we are both Muslims and profess to get our guidance and inspiration from the same Quran and Hadith. Sometimes this reminds me of a conversation I overheard between two Muslim brothers. The one was adamant that all food was prohibited until proven Halaal whilst the other believed all is permitted until proven Haraam.' These words were spoken by a dear friend. He was not well. In fact, he was terminally ill. I knew that and his family was aware of it. He however wanted to do so much still.

I was sitting next to his bed, and it was evident that he was emaciated and a mere physical shadow of his former self. His mind was as sharp as ever however and he critically analyzed what the specialists informed him of his condition. 'Doc, the two of us must finish our Hajj project. We have been discussing it for decades now. We first said that after ten years of collaboration we were going to put our efforts into a book form. Then we postponed it to fifteen years. We then extended our intentions to twenty years. In two years it will be twenty-five years! I am not going to wait a minute longer! I am going to start on it right now!' he said with sheer determination evident echoing with every word he softly but firmly expressed. It was going to be a momentous task. Sadly, he would not have time to initiate it, never mind complete it.



*Hajj is also about remembering those who are not with us.*

We tried to convince him to return to hospital in order to optimize his treatment but he refused as he was convinced that he was eventually going to get better. He had an amazingly supportive family structure. In retrospect it was probably the best for him as he most likely would have rapidly deteriorated in the cold, mechanical and clinical hospital environment. As doctors we frequently

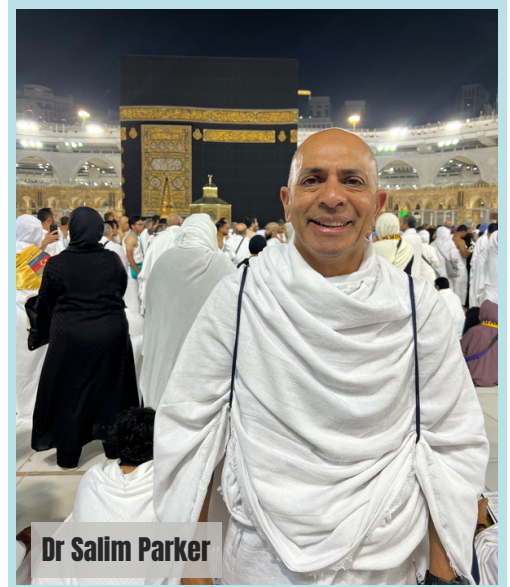
oscillate between the medical and life-extending benefits of hospital treatment and the emotional, mental and physical side-effects thereof. How wonderful it would be if one day we can say with the utmost precision that a particular treatment will improve a condition to exactly a certain extent and precisely quantify and predict the risks associated with it! But the nature of medicine is very fluid and as doctors we have seen both ends of the spectrum. One patient's cancer spontaneously regressed and another's spread within a few days.

### ***" His Duaas were answered, and I was the grateful beneficiary thereof"***

'Life would be really good if we had certainty,' he said philosophically. 'Doc, we need to ensure that all people approach Hajj the same way, so that there is no intolerance of how people perform their rituals. It is after all the most important journey any Muslim will ever embark on, and they must all feel that there is no doubt that Allah has accepted their Hajj,' he said. I burst out laughing. 'You know very well that there are differences of opinion. One Mathaabb believes in strictly following a certain sequence whilst another will be more flexible. Like you said, everyone wants to be in no doubt that their Hajj is accepted and they try to abide by how they were taught,' I replied. 'Exactly,' he countered. 'All we need to do is to convince them that they are both right,' he said. 'And how are we going to do that?' I asked. 'You just continue writing your stories,' he replied.

'Remember, man's capacity to sin is exceeded by Allah's capacity to forgive. Of course transgressions will be punished, but with true repentance forgiveness is ensured. Is that not what our Deen is all about? Forgiveness and the quest for paradise? Hajj is an example of this as we all are guided that we should never doubt that Allah will accept our Hajj. On completion of the journey in the correct manner we are considered to be free of sin and then actively should pursue to maintain that status. Islam is about good triumphing over bad. All of us can inherently sin but we should mobilise our inner good to showcase the true humility and compassion of our Islamic spirit,' he said. I sat in awe listening to the words of a dying man who was fighting to continue to do good. He was breathing, and he was pursuing.

He was breathing heavier and was clearly tired. 'You must rest,' I said. 'Yes, I should so that I can build up my strength. I accept that I am weak but I know I have a strong mind,' he replied. There was again the issue of both of us viewing his condition from different point of views. I wanted him to be at ease and allow the Almighty to gently recall him whilst his feisty spirit wanted



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to complete tasks at hand. 'Keep me in your Duaas when you are on Arafat this year,' he out of the blue requested. In fact it sounded more like a plea. Hajj was more than three months away. 'I have no notion if I'll be there!' I exclaimed. I have been blessed to have stretched out my hands at the time of Wuqoof for twenty successive years but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me travelling for the past three years.

'Oh, you will be there this year,' he smiled. 'I am making Duaa for that.' There is something about the prayers of the terminally ill pious believer that seems to resonate in spheres unknown of. I greeted him and left. I was kept up to date about his condition by his family and called him on occasion for four days, but he probably was too weak to take my calls. On the fifth day I received a call to say that he was very weak and I rushed to his house but his soul had departed by the time I got there. As I wrote out his death certificate, I realised that the project he spoke so passionately of could not be left unattended. His passing away has to give rise to an initiative to resuscitate and complete it and I was going to drive it.

His Duaas were answered, and I was the grateful beneficiary thereof. I received my visa to travel to the Holy Lands and insha-Allah, will join the millions of those blessed by Allah to stand on Arafat. I would have loved to see the grimace on his face, the soft chuckle that he would have whispered and the Duaas he would have made if I could have conveyed the good news to him.

I wrote this story filled with insightful and priceless memories of what he taught and gently persuaded, and what exciting but as yet unknown journey awaits. I may have embarked on many journeys but no two are ever the same and each one could potentially be my last one. May Allah grant those who inspired us, worked with us, and gently guide us with the utmost of patience the highest place in Jannah. Though I am saddened by their departure, I am comforted that I will be at a place where my prayers for them will by the will of Allah be accepted. And I'll make Duaa that I am able to continue writing, as it was his Duaa.