

HAJJ STORIES

THE WOUNDS THAT LINGER

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'Please do not hit me,' she pleaded,

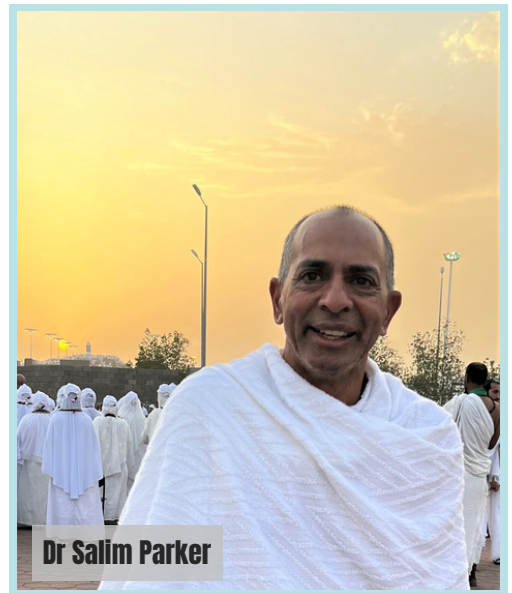
covering away from her chair to the wall behind it. Ahmad (not his real name) was taken aback. He was seated in a chair about three spaces away from her in the makeshift waiting room waiting for medical attention. I happened to be the doctor working there, in a hotel in Makkah about two weeks before Hajj was to start. The waiting area was a common space between two rooms in a family suite. The one room was used as my consulting room whilst the other one was occupied with workers for a large group of South African pilgrims. I had just stepped outside into the waiting area with my previous patient and noted about four patients still waiting, with her sitting at the very end. There were two empty chairs between her and Ahmad, with a couple sitting opposite him. It was my custom to call for the next patient myself and I duly did so. It was then that Ahmad got up.

He slightly stumbled in her direction in a clumsy manner, and this clearly startled her. Her reaction was totally unexpected, and he had a startled expression as he regained his composure and then proceeded to profusely apologise, saying that he would never hit anybody. He then walked to my room. She was clearly embarrassed and initially slumped back into her seat. I was standing in my doorway and went back inside when Ahmad entered. He was visibly shaken. 'Doc, I do not know that woman from a bar of soap, and I have no reason to hit her. I have never hit any woman in my life!' he blurted. I tried to pacify him and explained that his stumble as he stood up from his chair probably appeared that he was moving towards her in an aggressive manner. 'It's a mere misunderstanding,' I tried to reassure him, knowing deep down that there was much more to her reaction.

We chatted about his medical issues and after about ten minutes I had dispensed some medications for him. He had a very gentle personality, and it was

easy to see why the incident affected him so deeply. He literally would not hurt a fly! Except for some bullying incidents at school, he was rarely, if ever, exposed to violent situations. I had met him on a few occasions and he was always assisting those who needed some help. He was travelling alone in the sense that there was no family or friends whom he knew initially. He soon made many friends and the evening before assisted a wheelchair bound pilgrim in our group to perform an Umrah. We both had been with the group for more than two weeks and had met or interacted with virtually everyone. 'I have not seen that lady before,' he said. I replied that I had not seen her before either. Our hotel had only one South African group with the other guests being either from another African or North American country. As usual I escorted him to the waiting room and asked for the next patient. She was gone.

Late that evening a group of us went to the Grand Mosque to perform Tawaaf and Ahmad walked with me. He was in his early twenties and had just finished his university studies. His parents advised him to perform his obligatory Hajj as firstly a debt that had to be paid to his Creator and secondly as a form of appreciation for what he had achieved. He was from a wealthy family. 'My father worships the ground my mother gently and softly treads, and we have been raised that Heaven is at the noble feet of all mothers. I cannot imagine why the lady thought I was going to assault her,' he said, the incident clearly still bothering him. I tried to again reassure him that it was not his fault and tried changing the subject. We spoke of all the good that comes with Hajj, that he just may meet his soulmate on this journey, and that Hajj opens our eyes to the inner spiritual dimensions of our Deen. 'Hajj is still two weeks away and I already feel that I am in a completely different higher world! I can only imagine how it will be on Arafat,' he enthused.



Dr Salim Parker

The next morning I went to the clinic as usual. I normally get there about fifteen minutes before we open. She was standing outside, and I invited her into the consulting room where she immediately burst out crying, apologizing for her behaviour of the previous day. She was from North America and a revert to Islam after meeting a Muslim from the Indian sub-continent. She was attracted to the beauty of the religion which blossomed into the ultimate way of life for her. They married a year later. Her life centered around the gentleness of her Deen, his life was determined by the physical powers of patriarchy. The irony was that she wanted him to guide her into the deeper spiritual realms of Islam whilst he was floating on spirit and wine. 'I live in one of the most liberal countries in the world Doc. He took full advantage of his freedom whilst simultaneously shackling me into the prison of his culture which had nothing to do with Islam,' she said.

The physical beatings led her to be institutionalized and soon thereafter she divorced him. 'I left his way of life but was never going to let go of my Deen,' she continued. We then chatted about her presenting medical condition, and I gently introduced her to ways of handling her post traumatic stress ordeals. 'Why can he not see the perfection of our religion?' she cried. 'Physically abusing a spouse to engender authority and dominance has nothing to do with Islam and is in fact the antithesis of its teachings. All I wanted was for us as a couple to be subservient to Allah, whilst he was attracted to the vices of my community,' she said sadly. I was glad about her acceptance of the inner essence of her Deen but sad that for the person who introduced it to her it was just a fad. The waiting room was filling up rapidly and I soon thereafter escorted her out, never to see her again.

We were kept busy until the days of Hajj arrived and soon we stood on Arafat. Ahmad was enveloped in a halo of wonder, amazement and gratitude and could not thank his Creator enough for granting him this opportunity. 'Here we are all truly equal, irrespective of race, gender, status or creed,' he said. 'No man should ever lift his hand against a woman' was one of his prayers, the incident clearly still on his mind. I informed him that it is known that men are more aware of the rights and virtues of women after performing Hajj. Just maybe married couples should perform Hajj as soon as they can afford it and not wait till their middle or older age. Hajj is about reaching out to our Creator, but is also about bonding with a spouse, extending the hands of help and friendship, and forming one united Ummah free of discrimination of any kind.



Every woman on Hajj has her own unique story