

## ***THE LONG ROAD AHEAD...***

We see the wounds - the ones that are outside, and our heart goes out to them. But do we see the pain and suffering inside? These are the more fortunate survivors of the Pakistan Earthquake who thanks to the magnanimity of the UAE Govt. have been flown in with their attendants so that they can be healed and sent back.

There is 13-year old Muzammil - he is asleep, but tears are running down from the corners of his eyes. He is sweating profusely from the fever he has as a result of his wounds. "Muzammil" says the Nurse, gently, very gently, "You have visitors." He opens his eyes and there is a look of sheer terror in them. Then he realises that he is away from the quaking earth and destruction in which his entire family perished.

I see a young girl, Nusrat who is in a lot of pain. She is beautiful and no more than 18 years old. She has been operated upon for injuries to her backbone. She refuses to smile and refuses to eat. My doctor friend tells her that if Allah has saved her, it must have been for a reason. Now it is not for her to starve herself to death. She says she cannot eat, that the food just won't go down. We don't even ask her what happened. We want her to talk in her own time, only when she is ready. Scratching her wounds to satisfy our curiosity will not help - it will simply make her relive her nightmare.

Then there is badly hurt Hina, whose 3-month old infant has been flown in with her along with her old grandmother. The baby boy, wrapped up like a bundle, lying in the cot next to her, reminds us that miracles are possible - that Allah can do all things.

Next to them there is a middle-aged couple. The wife, Shabana Bibi, has suffered severe injuries. They have managed to save her leg from being amputated. She has also been through some skin grafting, with skin taken from her thigh to be used elsewhere. She is in pain, sore all over, but so patient and thankful to Allah for being alive. Her husband, I get the feeling, is hurting more for her than she is herself. They have nothing left except the clothes on their back. He is communicative, as if by talking about his pain, he thinks he might feel better. He describes how when the earthquake came, he saw two mountains shifting from their place, coming closer to each other and crushing the valley in between - as well as its inhabitants! His eyes mist as he describes the agony and the horror upon horror when the rain came down -and then the hailstones. They were pretty religious people in his village, he says, so who were instrumental in making Allah's chastisement descend upon them, he wonders. I ask him what makes him think it was punishment and not a trial - his and ours - his in his adversity and ours in our prosperity. I think he gets my point.

Then there is Jamil the 11-year old who ran 15 kms with a big gash on his head and bleeding profusely. A marathon runner in the making, we tease him. He smiles, perhaps for the first time since the day he passed out after seeing the valley littered with broken furniture and bodies. How come, he wonders, that death came to so many despite running so fast and yet the most unlikely people survived.

In the children's ward, there is also 5 year-old Munawar with his hands and feet all bandaged. This child has a totally blank look on his face. I try to make him laugh by doing a little puppet show for him with his soft toys, but there is no change whatsoever in his facial expressions. These are unseeing eyes that do not comprehend anything. "O Allah, please help him", I pray from the very depth of my being.

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The attendant of the pretty little 3-year old Gulnaz in the same room turns out to be her father. She is all bandaged up, while according to him, he has only a 'slight' wound on his foot which he shows me. He is a brave man, considering that his wife and son were amongst the casualties and little Gulnaz is the only family he has left. Will his wound heal? He is so composed while my heart bleeds for his loss. The only clue I get to his pain is when he asks if he can get a 'pass' to go to Saudi Arabia and do Umrah. And he doesn't even have a passport !

Then there is the old lady, Shaheen, whose middle-aged son is her attendant. Her rib cage was crushed. She has been operated upon and is being told to breathe into some kind of a hand gadget, something essential for her to do so that her lungs will expand. She says it is too difficult to do and she will do it after she gets well. She grabs my hand while I am reading the Quranic verses of Healing over her and insists that I blow on her when I am done. How are you doing? I say to her son. "You look tired." They have separate sleeping quarters, so I can't figure out why he has dark circles under his eyes and looks half-sick. "Can't sleep", he mumbles. "Afraid that I might wake up to another earthquake."

"Do you think I will ever be able to walk again?" says 16-year old Ayesha as tears roll down her cheeks. I know that she can feel nothing below her waist and has been measured for a wheelchair by the hospital authorities. " You have to believe that Allah has power over all things," I say, dodging a direct reply to her question. After all we must also fly on the wing of hope and not just fear, otherwise we will go down.

Then there is Fatima, a schoolteacher whose husband's shop fell down on him and he was crushed from the neck down. She found him under the debris, with very little life left in him and left no stone unturned to get him medical help. Several surgeries later, he is still in bad shape and she refuses to leave his side. He has nightmares and so does she, but she has such courage and determination that I almost envy her. She has left her 2 small children with her friends in Pakistan and is very clear in her mind that her husband comes first. Misty-eyed, she proudly shows me their pictures which have been e-mailed to her and my heart goes out to her. I can see by the way that she is talking that she is heading for a nervous breakdown. This one needs the most help, I say to myself, because we cannot see her wounds.

By now it is me that is all mangled up inside. The smile on my face has stopped reaching my eyes – it has pretty much frozen on my lips. These are the scenes that we must get used to, these are the people we need to help. While we bleed inside for them, we must be strong on the outside for them, for they really need us. I am reminded of what our Prophet (saw) said: *"The Muslims in their mutual love, kindness and compassion, are like the human body where one of its parts is in agony, the entire body feels the pain both in sleeplessness and fever."* "O Allah!" I call out to Him, "Please, please, help us to help them."

*(The names in this story have been changed to protect the identity of the patients)*