

A Voyage of Self Discovery

The Story of a Doctor Who Had Cancer
While She Was Pregnant

Dr. Noor al-Bar
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Foreword

By Dr. Walid Fitaihi

A Light¹ for the Insightful

Why should you read this book?

Why should you read the story of Noor?

Because it carries the light you need, to guide you through the rest of your life.

Each one of us arrives at this world to fill an awaiting void.

Every human being is created for a purpose.

And some are chosen by God to “revive” by their passing.

I wonder, did it cross her mind; the child Noor or the young Noor, that the story of her life shall be destined to revive and shine upon the lives of everyone around her?

Not only so, but her story shall become an example for all people to come.

I wonder, was the young Noor aware that the story of her death shall signify the purpose of her life?

And did it ever dawn on her that she will depart this world at the age of thirty three?

Truly, she is the meaning of her name Noor.. Light.

So, if you were searching for a glimpse of light, incarnated in a story, then this is it; the life of a young Muslim doctor, who learnt the Quran by heart. So open your heart, and may you find a glaring gleam inside, to rekindle the flare of life within you.

Why should you read the story of Noor?

Because Noor will unveil the truth for you, that which had been concealed from you for years, in an insane world, in which everyone scurries along a frenzied race for gains, profits, and fulfillment of animal desires.

A world in which the means have become the ends, afflicted with disregard for intents, which ought to be sought more fervently than goals.

Noor made me ponder whether I was truly working for the sake of God, as I declare to myself. Because if so, then why had it not yet become the dearest deed to my heart; staying up the nights in supplication, to seek nearness to Him, Whom I proclaim to love? After all, is there a higher purpose to love than nearness and approach?

¹ Light is English for “Noor”; an Arabic name. (The translator).

If you mean to unveil yourself to yourself, and wish to bare your soul before you are unveiled and bared before the whole of creation, at a nearing day of judgment, then Noor will aid you with God's will.

Congratulations Noor. By God, I can only think of you as someone taking a test, amongst so many others preoccupied with their answers. However, some had done so brilliantly thus far, that the examiner takes away their test sheets, saying: that's enough, you pass with flying colors, and I shall spare you the rest of the test.

Perhaps God Almighty saw three decades of your life, and spared you the remaining trials and tribulations.

Those who see only the surface of life may feel sorrow for your departure, seeing how you passed away at the prime of your life. Yet, such people perceive only with their senses. The insightful, on the other hand, have another view; that God has chosen you to become a light for their wisdom.

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POEM

By Dr. Shihab Ghanem

(A Tear for Dr. Noor Muhammad Ali Al-Bar, may Allah rest her soul)

You made me cry, O Noor!
Ah, you made me cry,
With your subdued narration, full of faith.
By Allah you are a model
For the daughters of Eve, over the ages.
For you have memorized by heart the entire Quran,
Since the dawn of your happy childhood,
And you were always first
.. always first amongst your mates,
Year after year .. the joy of the eyes of your father
Who himself was, and still is, always top.
Then you became a sincere doctor,
Forged out of true metal.
And when the disease came,
You faced it with the heart of a believer
Who surrenders to the will of the Almighty.
May Allah give you an abode in His Paradise,
And what dwelling is there better than one in Paradise!
May Allah too give fortitude to all your family in their distress,
And inspire their tongues
To praise Him repeatedly.

Preface

In this book, I shall share with my reader a part of my soul, while living a unique experience; that of having cancer while I'm pregnant, when the thought of death seems ever nearer, my options so entangled, and when my faith in a Great, Overseeing and Powerful Creator becomes my only means of rescue.

I made this book into a series of short essays, written in a fluent narrative to facilitate its reading.

I ask God that it becomes a balsam and light for every aching heart in tribulation. Then again, who among us is spared from tribulations!!

From Full Health to Cancer

A doctor, a mother to a three year old boy, and an expectant mother in my first trimester; this is who I am.

And a few weeks ago, I had my thirtieth birthday.

My story began when I noticed a small lump, at the start of my pregnancy. Unmindful at first, I decided to ask my obstetrician, who sent me to a breast surgeon for a second opinion, though dismissing my concern by saying "given your young age and gestation, I am optimistic. However, just to be certain".

At the breast surgeon's clinic, she was very discrete, as all surgeons are, and the only words she did say were "let's take an ultrasound".

My concerns grew day by day, and although I was asking God for His protection from ill thoughts, my apprehensions became worse all of a sudden; turning from simple worries to torment.

If I depart my husband and son, who will tend to them? I began to entertain the notion of finding my husband a wife amongst my friends, so as to care for my son when I leave, but then again, whom can I trust with such a task? Such bitter, tearful thoughts overcame me. And although I couldn't share my fears with anyone for their sheer absurdity, I carried on alone through this episode nonetheless.

As I went to my ultrasound appointment, which took place at the same hospital in which I work, I received my first news from the radiologist; "This isn't just a nodule; there is a mass at its periphery, but I can't guess what it is. We must take a biopsy, and we must be quick. Let's make it the day after tomorrow".

At that moment, and just as this piece of information had weighed down on me like a mountain, my pager beeped; calling me to assess a patient at the emergency ward.

I held my tears, buried my fears and rushed to the patient awaiting my assessment.

And as the patient was talking, I felt as if I was in another world.

I wasn't occupied with what my doctor had said, rather, I was probing the burden I felt on my heart and mumbled "God willing, all will be well".

Time flew by as my scheduled operation came, and since I was working at the same hospital in which I had the procedure, I found myself checking for the result every few hours, even though I knew that my coming visit to the breast surgeon was only five days away.

I had a peculiar feeling as I waited for my results. I had an incessant premonition that it was a tumor; its image on the scanner, the way it felt under my fingers, and the bizarre messages I kept receiving during those days. For instance, I would open my twitter account, which I hadn't checked for a month, and find nothing but Dr. Samia al-Amoudi's retweets of a breast cancer patient; how she faced her illness, and how she informed her children.

Nevertheless, I kept trying to set aside my worries and remain positive. I recalled Ali Bin Abitalib's saying "I always anticipate the best from God, so if it transpires to be well, I thank God for His Grace, otherwise, I would have lived optimistic for a time". Then came Friday; the day of the long awaited appointment with my breast surgeon, following my morning rounds, which I quite enjoyed as a matter of fact.

I headed down to the desk to look for my test results, and just as I was praying to God that I find it, I saw the report.

Owing to my trepidation, the words seemed muddled somehow. I didn't know where to begin my reading, and as I started to read from the middle of the page, I couldn't understand a word, but when I gazed at the bottom of the report, to my dismay, I found the words "**Invasive ductal carcinoma, stage 3/3**".

The words seemed obscure before me, then I heard a voice; it was my own.

I was talking with an audible tone of voice: "Thanks be to God, thanks be to God".

A few minutes passed by as I was uttering these words unaware, my breath racing, my heart pounding, and to my bewilderment, my eyes shedding their tears. What I was thinking at that moment, I can't quite remember.

All I do recall from that instance was the sound of my muffled voice uttering the phrase "Thanks be to God", mixed with the noise of my sobbing and my racing breathing.

Then the thought crossed my mind; could this be the end of the healthy, sound and strong Noor, could this be the beginning of an era; one which I cannot foresee how long it will last.

I called my husband and said "how are you my love? The result came, and I need you". That was all I could say, and he didn't ask for more. To my relief, he replied "I'm coming now" and hang up, because I wouldn't have been able to utter the diagnosis.

Even though it was noon, the on-call room was unusually empty, and I made full use of it. I kept praising God for His blessings, and remembered the Prophet's supplication "O God, guard me from my calamity and recompense me for the better". I wept and I praised.

When I recall those moments now, I feel a profound thankfulness to God for leading me into this bout of spontaneous praise for Him, since it wasn't me, but Him. I thank Him for allowing me to receive the news in seclusion; alone, behind a closed door, where I could weep unseen, because had I known an hour later, it would have been during my appointment with the surgeon, and she would have had to comfort me with seemingly empty words.

When my husband came, I met him with a smile at the entrance of the hospital and said "Thank God". We took no more than a few steps when he heard my gasps and took me in his arms, where I cried endlessly.

From that moment onwards, until my appointment that is, I shed what tears I had, till there were none left.

My doctor greeted me with a smile and said in a mollifying tone "How are you, how is your pregnancy, and how is your morning sickness? How did the biopsy go?".

Then she said "Alright, we have a clear answer now" and I interjected "I know, I read the report".

"You know?", she said in confoundment. "Yes, I spared you from having to break the bad news to me", I responded.

And she said; "what a relief, I was worried how I was going to give you the news. Well then, we must act quickly. Now, we have the immediate task of eradicating this tumor, and many more decisions to go through".

Then, she began to inform me of the bitter details and options of treatment available, which struck me like a series of bombshells.

Bombshells

Just as my doctor told me I had breast cancer; a fact which had become known to me an hour before, and made me weep before I managed to gather my strength, she went on to bombard me a series of bombshells.

"Alright then, we have many decisions to make in a short time.

First of all, the pregnancy; do you want to go through with it or end it?

As for surgery; given the tumor's size and speed of growth, you'll need a total mastectomy; we will not be able to remove the tumor on its own.

With regards to chemotherapy; not all women require it after surgery, however, considering your young age and your specific type of tumor, we will have to give you chemotherapy as well, and this is where we have to address the issue of your pregnancy; I don't think we can postpone it until you give birth, hence, you must either undergo treatment while you're still pregnant, or we could terminate the pregnancy, in which case, I'm not confident that you will ever be able to carry again; after all the chemotherapy and radiation you will receive".

As she was talking, I saw that my husband was startled at the notion that I may never conceive again, but he was just able to contain himself. As for me, I felt that every new piece of information I heard was weighing down on my heart. Bearing a concealed smile of bewilderment, I thought that this was all happening too fast, and as the moments went by, I realized that my past life had come to its end, and that this was the dawn of a new life and a "new Noor"; who, soon enough, will have a mastectomy, and lose her hair from chemotherapy, she may lose her unborn child and never conceive again, or worse still, she may not have much longer to live.

Just as all this information was starting to sink in my mind, my doctor went on to say "Given your age, we must consider genetic testing, because if you have the variant cancer gene we may take into account the removal of your second breast as well, and maybe even your ovaries as a precaution".

My respect for my doctor notwithstanding, the last piece of information was needless at the time, since I had just become aware of having a malignant tumor, the news of which alone was too much for me to absorb, let alone the talk of a possible second lesion which may befall the other breast or

ovaries, over the course of five to ten years. After all, all truths are not to be told.

All the while she was talking, I held firm; asking questions and weighing my options, to the extent that she couldn't provide me with all the answers I needed, and opted to consult an oncologist to obtain a more accurate picture. However, the moment she left the room to arrange the consultation, my floodgates opened, and I broke into tears, while my husband held me for several minutes, as I tried to rid myself of the overwhelming burden on my heart. Minutes later, when I looked into my husband's face, I saw a faint smile and a guise of composure. "You too need to cry" I said, "don't hold back". He met my words with a smile and teary eyes, and said; "If we both cried, who will comfort us both?".

A knock was soon heard on the door, I wiped away my tears, and he leapt back to his seat, as if nothing had happened.

As the oncologist came into the room, he was looking down with an unmistakable air of sorrow.

I thought to myself; does he feel compelled to portray such solemnness to all of his patients? I smiled at him, so he smiled back, and said in halting Arabic "How are you?".

"Fine, thanks be to God" I replied.

He continued "My parents were Lebanese, however, I only know a few words in Arabic".

He began to review with us all our options and the possibilities of treatment available, answering all of our questions and providing us with all the information we needed to make a decision. I felt dissociated, as if talking about somebody else, other than myself. I discussed all of our potential options objectively, and asked about all the technical details. However, just as he finished and left the room, I saw another another opportunity to set my tears free.

A brief moment afterwards, a nurse came in, and handed me a large book titled "Breast cancer"; telling me that I would find it an excellent reference. I glanced at the title and it suddenly struck me; that if this is relevant to me now.

She said "We have support groups for breast cancer patients, where you can meet other women who have a similar condition, and we also have a specialized social worker, if you wish to talk to her and share your emotions".

Although it was a kind initiative on her part, it only added to my growing sense that my identity, life and needs have changed as of that moment.

The Prophet PBUH says "Seize five before five" and he mentioned "Seize your health before your illness".

Two Days of Apprehension

Even after my operation was scheduled, we were still engaged in ongoing discussions with the doctors on the aptness of the particular course of action we chose.

Endless technical uncertainties kept transpiring at every turn.

Should we do another scan before surgery to track the tumor, or should we wait, lest we harm the baby?

Should we inject a dye during the operation to explore the nearby lymph nodes, or must we eschew that for the sake of the baby and remove all the nodes we find; risking potential complications along the way, not the least of which would be a possible nerve damage or an intractable swelling in the limb. Endless choices loomed at every corner, which seemed only to multiply as the scheduled surgery neared; choices which neither I, nor the doctors seemed confident enough to make.

As my fears mounted, new trepidations began to loom; what if the anesthesia goes awry, or the procedure fails.

At that moment, I decided to halt these worrisome images scrambling in my mind, and seek refuge in Him who cares for me and aids me; He who is All-Knowing, who knows my best cure and my safest path; He who is Capable of everything, who is defeated by nothing, and who does as He wishes. Thus, I returned to stand before Him.

I implored Him "O God, those doctors are mere beings of Your creation, for it is You who bestowed upon them what little knowledge they possess, and it is You who steers and commits them to the service of others, and had You not commanded us to take the means of cure, then no doctor nor medicine would I have sought. It is Your Will to entrust Your cure to the means we hold.

O God, I entrust You with my affairs, as I trust none but You; neither my surgeon nor my oncologist. I surrender all my undertakings to Your infinite Wisdom, for You are far better acquainted with my welfare than I or they will ever be.

O God, they misjudge, but You are Capable of everything.

O God, they are powerless, but You are Capable of everything

O God, I beg of You to shepherd this operation, in spite of our oblivion, towards my welfare and that of my unborn child.

The surgeon is but an instrument in Your Hand, so guide her to remove what she must and spare what she must, so that I may escape the troubling, daunting complications they dread.

O God, I ask You and none other, for none is Capable but You, and none is Knowing but You.

You and no other is God

You and no other is God

You and no other is God

Moral of the Tale

At this point, the more obscure and noteworthy issue of my story's moral must be addressed; what wisdom lies behind my experience; this sudden, indefinite change in my life. What purpose resides in this scheme?

It didn't take me long to discern the first reason, which seemed to me clear as day; I was engulfed, prior to this illness, in a whirlpool of a life, where I was staggering blindly. I had been a first-year postgraduate in psychiatry, burdened with a grueling schedule, and for weeks on end, all I seemed to do was work. Amidst my scurry, I had overlooked myself and my true purpose; what was the point behind this rush, and why did I depart my home and greater family; living as an alien, accompanied by my husband and son, whom I seldom had the time to see, while my only child was moving back and forth between a nine-hour nursery and a babysitter.

Everything in my life was hurried and savorless; my prayers were rushed for the sake of work, I saw my husband every week or fortnight, and I only saw my child when I dressed him for sleep.

Something inside me was screaming out that this was not the life I wanted, because what meaning does it have, and what purpose does it serve, where is my altruism and relationships, what of my reading, contemplation, worship and writing, how did everything I deem valuable in my life die out? I kept persuading myself that this was only temporary; that I shall spend only a couple of years in this bustle, then my workload will subside, allowing me more time to regain my identity and purpose.

I was in dire need of a respite to stand before God in utter seclusion, to recall my original aim and intent, to retake the helm, and to steer my ship back on course.

I was in dire need of a respite to regroup, because, was I heading in the direction I set out for, am I acquiring the knowledge I sought, or had my sacrifice been reduced to the procurement of an American Board degree, without gaining the knowledge it entails except a little, as I was so consumed in the routine work, that little did I have time for my true purpose in work.

However, I never allowed myself this respite, as I saw such pause a defeat, so I never indulged in an intermission to catch my breath and put my

affairs in order. I always believed that fortitude obliged me to keep my stride regardless.

This is why I believe that God gave me this opportunity; knowing, through His infinite Wisdom, that the obstacle which would halt me must be a momentous one, so that I may reset my priorities, as I realize that the end to my entire life is looming unabated by anything, save a heavenly miracle. Because, unlike anything else, when death nears, one truly sets his priorities straight, and the important takes precedence over the trivial.

It is incredible how such an event can belittle the significance of my work, my degree, my social status and my pursued career title of "American Board"; at a time when they almost comprised my entire life. As I began to reevaluate the ends and the means, I remembered that the degree I had been striving for was only a means to be able to "give" and benefit others, and to draw myself nearer to God by this giving; so, how did I lose track of this intention, and how did it wane to the point of oblivion.

Yesterday, I sat in seclusion; confiding my worries and tears to God. I felt God's mercy and love flooding my heart, and a compelling smile overcame me as I was drenched in tears, and as I surrendered to a blissful, thankful prostration, I thought "this is the purpose of my creation; this nearness and bliss".

On The Eve of Surgery

On that day, I received several calls and messages from my oncologist, both on my phone and email, asking me to meet with him immediately, which struck fear in my husband's heart and mine, and since we were very far from the hospital at that time, we decided to leave everything and go see him. As we travelled, both our hearts were racing with fearfulness, and the vision of befalling calamity preoccupied my thoughts. Could it be that new tests revealed the inoperability of my tumor due to metastasis, or that he decided to settle for a solely palliative course of therapy. Then a sense of comfort washed over me as I recalled the verses from the Quran; {Those to whom the people have said, "The people have mobilized against you, so fear them." But this only increased them in faith, and they said, "God is enough for us; He is the Excellent Protector". So they came back with grace from God, and bounty, and no harm having touched them. They pursued what pleases God. God possesses immense grace}. (Family of Imran 3:173,174).

What could the doctor possibly say? Could he tell me that I have no more than a month to live? Is that really in his hands?

Who might he be to make me so fearful of his words? What knowledge or power could he possibly possess compared to God's Knowledge and Power? How much worth does his words hold in the face of God's Will?

"God is enough for me; He is the Excellent Protector"; those were the words I kept reciting until I met him.

It turned out, he only had the results of more recent tests to show us, which, to put it in his words, "were neither good nor bad, but important to know".

I sighed with relief as I glanced at my husband who said "this doctor of yours nearly gave us a heart attack!!".

Thus, I returned home, with grace from God and bounty, unharmed, to prepare for my surgery which was only one day away.

The Last Evening

On the upcoming day, I will experience anesthesia for the first time in my life.

As of tomorrow, I do not know what complications I will face.

Not until tomorrow, will I realize the true extent of my tumor, and whether my lymph nodes are involved or not.

Amidst these fears, a bizarre, inexplicable state of mind swept over me; I felt as if it was the eve of Eid.

On these memorable nights, we as children could not contain our excitement for the upcoming day, which would bring with it all the gifts, treats and new clothes we could wish for.

So confounding was this veiled delight, yet it suffused my heart.

I slept early and had a peaceful slumber that night, devoid of visions concerning my operation; I of all people, who seldom enjoyed a restless night, especially when I was embarking on a new work or expected to meet new people.

The next morning, as I left for hospital, I was repeating those words; "As long as I have Your company, nothing shall harm me. You are all I need".

Indeed, God sufficed me.

He eased my every affair, be it great or trivial, despite my incognizance.

For instance, an anesthesiologist colleague of mine came to be at the preoperative care unit on the month of my operation by sheer coincidence, and made sure that all the surgical team and anesthesiologists who worked on my operation were females, and he did this without my asking. How awful I would have felt to have been in a room full of men.

Also, the obstetricians who monitored the health of my baby before and after the operation were very kind and sympathetic, since I was their colleague.

Additionally, all the surgical nurses who cared for me happened to be mothers themselves, and they treated me as one of their daughters; they held my hand, brought my husband to accompany me to the door of the operating theatre, and they ordered me a private room after the surgery, even though I didn't ask them to. They really did spoil me with kindness.

And since I was pregnant, I couldn't take a tranquilizer prior to the operation in fear for my baby's safety, hence, I remained fully conscious right up to the last moment, and saw all the surgical tools prepared for me; the scalpels, the cutters, and so on, yet, I felt as if God had flooded me with this sense of peacefulness, and I kept reciting the Prophet's supplication "In the name of God, with Whose name nothing in the earth or heavens shall harm. He is the Hearer, the Knower".

However, the last thing I recall before I lost consciousness was one of the nurses telling me "Don't be afraid, we'll take good care of you".

And I smiled as I thought; the care I really wish for is that of God; Lord of the Heavens and the earth.

The Evil Eye: The First Suspect

I was contacted by one of my closest friends who said "Noor, listen carefully; do you think the evil eye is the reason behind your illness?".

Naturally, this hadn't been the first time such an insinuation has been made; a while ago, another friend drew my attention to the threatened preterm labour I experienced when I was enrolled at McGill University in Canada, which forced me to abandon my scholarship then; and now, just as I was admitted alongside my husband to this scholarship in America, which was, on all accounts, a very demanding endeavor to prepare for, I encountered this illness only months into the program, and just as everyone I know were expressing their astonishment at the fact that my husband and I were accepted in the same city.

Well then, since I feel compelled to address this issue, I might as well start from the beginning: is there such a thing as the evil eye? Indeed there is. It is an irrefutable fact; substantiated by a Prophetic saying.

However, what possible gain could I achieve by blaming the evil eye for my illness, other than feeling bitter and hard done by; stricken with grief for the injustice brought upon me by some anonymous evil spirits lurking around me. Such ill feelings would only stir up a reclusiveness within me; as I would ceaselessly strive to conceal my blessings from the eyes of the world; living with the persistent feelings of doubt and hate towards those around me, as I would perceive them as my non-ending, potential source of misfortune.

Could such a state of mind be a favorable outcome? Do such feelings bring about cure, strength, or the desire to give?

Nonetheless, when I look around, I can see a multitude of people who have chosen to live this way; falling victim to such feelings.

Spinsterhood, divorce, the loss of a job or an investment opportunity, or an illness; such calamities can befall anyone, yet, we seem to be the only society in which people no sooner suffer such misfortune than they blame the evil spirits for their adversities, only to fall hostage to their grievances and sense of victimhood; fearing everyone around them, even the closest of people.

Moreover, such people squander the foremost pleasure found in the guise of adversity: the pursuit of Divine Wisdom and purport of an ordeal; had

it been a sign of love and nearness, or an opportunity for growth, transcendence, or betterment, frittered away amidst the bungled rummaging for the "culprit" who gave the evil eye.

Furthermore, God Almighty might have opened a door for undreamed of wealth and riches, guised in a given affliction, yet, they may pass by unnoticed, if a person is engrossed in tears and sorrow, from those who may have envied him, or practiced witchcraft against him.

Isn't it evident that we, as a society, give much more credit to the "invisible powers of evil" than is due? We allow these beliefs to fester and become our sources of misery, worry, and bitterness in life, to the point where some may feel them impervious, even to the powers of the Quran or prayer, which leaves society vulnerable to the fraud of masqueraders and cheats, who live off our insufficient reliance on God and His Power of protection.

The Prophet PBUH says "And know that if all the people were to gather to harm you, they would not cause you harm, except that which had been decreed on you by God. The pens have been lifted, and the ink has dried".

Only a Mastectomy, It Could Have Been Worse

Two days had passed since my surgery, and as the time came for redressing my wound, I had my first sight of my operation. Not two days ago, here was part of my body; a part which imparts to every woman her sense of femininity. As the nurse was tending to me, I displayed no special interest in the new sight, however, as soon as I was alone, it was time for me to look in the mirror.

The wound had an upsetting, uneven shape, since it wasn't feasible to perform a simultaneous plastic surgery, which would have prolonged the time of operation; exposing my unborn baby to unnecessary risk, and since I was scheduled to start chemotherapy as soon as possible, any further delay in the healing of the wound was deemed unwise.

I stared at the unsightly view; exacerbated by the two drainage tubes protruding from the edge of the wound, and said "Thank God. No more silliness".

In an attempt to belittle my shock, I started to recount the blessings God bestowed upon me:

- It's a part of my body which I do not need to be able to read or write, think, or walk. And as important as it may be, it only impacts one brief part of my life, not all of my life.
- Also, my operation, as serious as it may be, is nothing compared to that of the poor patient I came across a few months ago, who had his eye surgically removed because of a tumor, but could not be fitted with a prosthetic. Soon afterwards, he developed such an itch, that he used to insert his finger inside his eye socket. Subsequently he developed an abscess, as he was touching an exposed part of his brain. Some of us even dubbed him the "brain picker". Thank God it wasn't my eye.
- I thank God that my three-year-old son is healthy and well, because, if God had willed that he shall have the tumor instead of me, God forbid, it would have been a thousand times more insufferable on my part: for one, he is still oblivious to God's Wisdom; hence, he cannot find solace in discerning the purpose behind his illness, and all that remains for him to do will be to cry his eyes out of agony; the reason for which he can never

fathom. I truly believe that to be tried by the suffering of one's child is a far more harrowing ordeal than to be tried by the suffering of one's self.

- I thank God for preserving my mental faculties; my true wealth and my most prized possession. Once, I saw a nurse who came as a patient to the emergency ward; she was of my age. She had suddenly developed schizophrenia, despite having no family history of this disease. As she began to experience delusions, she became reclusive and lost her job. So, I thank God that my illness is physical, which usually induces people to come together and surround the patient with care and prayers for good health. And I thank God that He spared me the torment of mental illness, which is unfortunately still considered by many people to be self-inflicted.

- I thank God for the embrace of my family and friends, who comfort me, console me, and show me their affection. And I especially thank God for my parents, whose prayers for me are dearer to my heart than the whole world.

- I thank God who flooded me with His Mercy, surrounded me with His care, and invoked my sense of nearness to Him; from the moment I received the news of my illness, till now.

- And I thank God, who hitherto allowed me to keep my unborn child. Because as painful as it might be: coming to after losing a part of one's body, to regain consciousness after deliberately losing one's child would be manifold more unbearable. O God, I ask You to sustain Your blessings upon me, and may my pregnancy go to term. Furthermore, I ask You to bless me with a pleasing, pious child, who grows to be among Your righteous servants.

A Hard Lesson in Reliance on God

Since the start of my pregnancy, and even before being aware of my illness, my ultimate concern was to become as "ideal" a mother as possible.

I tried to think of and plan every little detail.

For one, my foremost concern, prior to my illness, was how to breastfeed my newborn for the longest period possible, though I will only be allowed a few weeks of leave, and must return afterwards to a grueling work schedule, which will keep me away from my child for a whole day at a time.

How can I protect my newborn baby from the potentially infectious environment of daycare.

I wanted to be the healthiest expecting mother, so I abstained from drinking tea and coffee, I refrained from using the microwave oven, I avoided carrying my mobile phone in my pocket, and turned it off most of the time, and I selected my food very carefully for the sake of his/her wellbeing.

I was under the impression that my power and planning are sufficient to provide my child with the full health I aspire to, hence, I overburdened myself with the tiresome task of overseeing every detail, even those which I will encounter after delivery. I bore this responsibility as if it was I, who would ensure my child the state of wellbeing.

However, this new incident changed everything; I of all people, who had forgone tea and coffee for the sake of my baby's health, had to undergo an operation under anesthesia whilst still pregnant, I underwent a radioactive dye injection as well, not to mention the dreadful, inevitable prospect of being subjected to chemotherapy: a ruthless annihilator of all growing cells. And so, I had to make my decision: I must either rely on God, trust in Him, and surrender to His Will, or I must resort to the unthinkable choice of knowingly taking the life of my own child, as per my doctors' advice, in order to spare him the possible consequences of chemotherapy.

I chose the former path.

And as I did, I realized, for the first time in my life, that I am but a slave to God; I have neither the power to harm, nor benefit myself; it is God alone who bestows health; and it is God alone who is capable of giving my child a full health, despite being suffused with a chemotherapeutic drug, or create it malformed for no apparent reason.

I realized that my sense of control was but an illusion, and my image of being the planner, manager, and doer was shattered by this lesson. I learnt that we humans are far weaker than to exert such power, and that God alone is the doer; the Powerful.

Dear Eastern Man

I often receive calls from my American friends and colleagues, asking about me and my husband: how is he coping, and is he in need of any help, or even mental counseling.

Whereas, with the calls I receive from my Arab friends, I infer a sense of surprise in their tone of voice, though a pleasant one; they often tell me: "Does your husband support you, how fortunate, thank God for having such a husband, who didn't fail or abandon you".

As if all Arab men are immoral by nature.

However, can you imagine if someone with whom you share a life for years, even if only as a roommate, experiences an illness or another ordeal, wouldn't it be your natural, instinctive reaction, to give them affection and support, let alone a person with whom you share a home, deep emotions, children, and a bedroom.

Why has it become so natural to assume that an Arab husband will abandon his wife at the first sign of hardship she faces.

My memory takes me back to a distant time; the time in class when my school teacher was trying to explain why Islam permits a man to marry more than one woman.

"Polygamy serves more than one purpose" she said, "For instance, women age faster than men, hence, a man who is still in the prime of his lustfulness must marry a younger woman to satisfy his needs". And I wondered; after the poor woman had devoted her entire life for his sake, and after she had strived and endured many a sleepless night for his prosperity, gave birth, and raised his children on the expense of her own wellbeing, does she deserve, at the autumn of her life, to be rewarded with his desertion for a younger woman; more apt for his earthly needs.

The other feeble excuse she offered at the time was the circumstance of a woman who develops cancer; given that she will be incapable of providing for his needs, hence, he will have the moral right to marry another, so as to preserve his purity.

Does this understanding conform to the religion that God Almighty sent down? Does this religion dictate that a man shall live in utter self-absorption; overwhelmed by his incessant concern for his unbridled, earthly desires.

Comment [1]:

Does this religion decree that a man, at such a time when his wife falls to illness, shall surrender to his animal lust, and seek the pleasure of intimacy with another woman, rather than seek the eminence of humanness, empathy, and support.

Is this, in actuality, the religion sent down by the Most Generous, Great God, whose commands urge gratitude and reciprocation of kindness.

In fact, Islam never mentioned polygamy, except in the context of social responsibility; wherein a man bears the burden of providing for more than one woman; and never in the sense of substitution, wherein wives are substituted, like the replacement of car parts. Moreover, this was the customary practice of this privilege in the early Islamic eras; as men sought marriage to divorcees and widows, so as to provide and care for them.

So, why must we instill a sense of selfishness in men, from such an early age? Why do we nurture their sense of entitlement over everybody else? Why do we encourage them to adopt a lordly attitude; as if they are born to serve none, but to be served, given, provided for, pleased, and entertained, for no apparent reason, save their sacred, masculine existence?

I truly believe that our men are better than this stereotype, that this aberrant, sexist upbringing has done us and them much harm, and that we are obliged to rise in our expectations of them; to the level of decent humanness, to say the least.

How May I Thank You, O God

I wished to dedicate my foremost words to You; to state that I stand, truly not knowing how to thank You. What magnificent a blessing that is, which stopped my mindless scurry dead in its tracks; my once blind pursuit of a cause that only grew more distorted as time passed.

You rescued me from the hustle, frenzied scuttle, and panting, to stand before You in pure serenity, to delight in the blessing of Your nearness; immersed in Your Mercy, as I reawaken within me the joy of sensing Your presence.

I long for Your company, O God. For, too long it has been, since I last appreciated Your closeness, despite praying to You five times a day.

I wonder, how much time has elapsed, whilst forms, people, and events thwarted my every attempt at approaching You; as I found myself drawn evermore, into the mire of unawareness. Without the comfort of Your nearness, everything seemed savorless, and every color effaced. What immense pleasure I find in this illness, which has brought me the opportunity to pause, mindless of everything else, and sit before you; as I did long ago. O, how I long for Your nearness.

I dare not propose upon You, save in those scarce moments, of which You are better acquainted. I dare not ask You to make the tumor vanish, or respond to treatment, nor do I dare to make special requests; perhaps, for the sheer pleasure I find in Your presence, as it seems to matter less; to live or die, as long as I stay in Your company, either way.

People pressure me into insisting upon my desires when I invoke You in my prayers, for if I do not, I am but a pessimist in their eyes, incapable of optimism, but I truly cannot, because how can I, after years of heedlessness, and on the day I verge on gaining such rare proximity, submit my list of wishes; all of which, ironically, deprive me of the reason that brought me so close to You.

As I reached out to You in supplication, as I was taught; asking You to restore my health, I found unrivaled comfort in the plea of Prophet Job; {Great harm has touched me, and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful}[H.Quran:21/83] .

How delicately phrased a plea.

{Harm has touched me}, not "ruined me", or "the pain has ravaged me, and I can no longer bear". He uttered those words as if to understate his anguish, knowing that You are far better acquainted with his suffering than he is; that You alone truly know what he endures.

My Lord; {Great harm has touched me}, he said, and no more; no further requests; he neither asked for cure, nor the return of his family, nor anything else.

Job chose not to specify; perhaps for his sheer gratitude towards God, who is All-Knowing and Acquainted with that which is best for him; hence, {and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful} shall suffice.

"Such is my harm, and such is Your Mercy" shall suffice.

You are All-Knowing of my torment and my state, You know what best suits me better than I do, both in this life and in the Hereafter.

So, what will it serve me to say more.

I shall endlessly repeat; "Thanks be to God, Thanks be to God, Thanks be to God". Because, no praise can ever suffice to thank You for the blessing of Your nearness; especially after I had spent so long adrift.

What People Have to Say

God's destiny bears Mercy and blessings that ease its impact on the soul, whereas people's talk and their pretense to wisdom is often much harder to tolerate by a cancer patient than the affliction itself.

My remark foremost concerns those closest to the patient; who wish him no ill will at all, though, they are often too self-centered to realize that their advice may be so narrow-minded, and entails endless, patronizing counseling.

"What, do you want to stay in America? It would be a huge mistake if you did; you must come home. We have Dr so and so, who is more than qualified to handle your case. What on earth keeps you there?"

Amidst this unwarranted advice, the speaker fails to realize that my husband still works in America, or that my needs exceed the scope of a lone breast surgeon, as I require a team of specialists; including an oncologist capable of deciding on the best treatment for my relatively rare type of tumor, especially when I am pregnant. But, even after I explain all of this, I find her still bemused by my decision, and mutters sarcastically "may God guide you to the right path".

As I am taking my son to daycare, I come across another dear friend of mine, who, without warning, tells me "If you want my opinion, you should terminate your pregnancy, this is what I think".

But, is she aware of the details that underlie such a decision? No.

Does she know what my husband, or my doctors think of this matter? No.

Did I, by any chance, ask her for advice, in my hour of perplexity? Also No.

Then why this sense of self-importance?

In another incident, a close friend calls me, whom I know to be sincerely affectionate towards me; she tells me fervently: "Your mother told me of your wish to go to term, and a listener must be wise, even if the speaker is not; it seems that you have lost your senses, and need someone to wake you up". And at that moment, she began to shout "you are sick; not with a cold, but

with a serious illness. You will only bring to life a deformed child because of your therapy".

I believe that, at this point, you realize what I meant when I said that God's destiny is easier to bear than listening to people's advice, not to mention their curiosity and unthinkable questions, like "will they remove one or both breasts?", "chemotherapy will cause your hair to fall, won't it?", "I wonder, what caused your illness?", "It's unbelievable that you're a doctor, yet you didn't discover this illness sooner", and many more.

A cancer patient is in need of people's support, consolation, prayers, and their sought advice.

I urge you, if you are close to someone with cancer, do not impose your views upon them, and do not offer them harsh, unsolicited advice, for, as good as your intentions may be, your words may still be too much to bear.

On the other hand, if you know a cancer patient from afar, take care not to give in to curiosity; as your questions may be unknowingly hurtful, and if your fervor for knowledge is too intense, search in a book or a website, and you will know from either source, that chemotherapy will cause hair to fall, without the need to ask.

We and Our Children

Illness provided me with a wonderful opportunity to find the time and come to know my three year old son.

I found the time to sit with him, play together, learn together, tell stories, and read books. I found the opportunity to know the keys to his character, his strong points and vulnerabilities, and I came to know what kind of person he is.

Illness restored my joy in motherhood, which I was denied by my grueling work routine. And as we communicated, talked, laughed, and went out to feed the ducks and squirrels, I contemplated how some mothers willingly deprive themselves of this immense pleasure. The image struck me, as I recalled children in our society playing with their carer (nanny) in shopping malls, and I thought, by God, if the parents of those children cannot bear to spend such playful time with them, then it is needless to say that the more demanding tasks of feeding and bathing will be the carers' chores as well.

However, little does this poor mother realize, that those childhood years, she so lightly wastes, will never come back, as every period of a child's life has its unique beauty and pleasure, and as time passes, children grow, and they no longer remain children; they will no longer be their mothers' when their gazes turn outwards; to their schools, company, and friends; she will not have in her possession to share, but her past relationship, and their sweet, yet distant memories, which could, if only she had them, bring her child back into her embrace, and make her his everlasting source of comfort, no matter how far away he sails.

Besides, if the carer is the one who feeds, cleans, sings him lullabies, plays with him, teaches him his first words, which might be in her own language, not his, prepares his food, takes him to nursery, and later to school, what part of motherhood will his real mother retain. Furthermore, how can such a mother nurture, in this small plant, the values and beliefs which will shape her child into the boy or girl she aspires to; when she barely knows her child.

Additionally, what will become of that child's emotional bond with his carer, with whom he spends such time, if she is replaced at any given circumstance. And in some social contexts, carers are treated with a kind of contempt, which will elicit, within the child, a love devoid of respect, or it will imply that the love he receives from other people is no more than their duty towards him; for which they deserve no gratitude; giving rise to such habits as to yell at his carer if she fails to tie his shoe lace, and cries for her if she goes away. Naturally, when he grows up, such ill treatment may very well be projected onto his future wife.

When a child's upbringing solely becomes the duty of a carer, and not his mother, other longterm behavioral patterns expectedly emerge; children may lack a sense of responsibility; as they learn to perceive such chores like putting away their toys after playing, or cleaning after themselves, to be beneath them. Also, they fail to learn the art of "giving"; since their relationship with their carer is one of constant receiving; not giving, they may grow to lack basic social skills, and may even lack the proper language, and they might not learn the meaning of true love, nor learn to express it. They may not experience the deep sense of security, which is only found in a relationship unthreatened by sudden abandonment or incomprehensible change, and they may grow up deprived of the skills necessary to succeed in the outside world.

Regrettably, those poor children will have to compensate for all these shortcomings the hard way, through arduous trial and error, and by fumbling through life; which can either make or break them.

Sadly, all of this may well have been an unintended consequence of two parents, who cared less for their child than they did for the social privilege parenthood affords them.

My Hardest Decision Yet

The one question everyone kept asking me about, on the day I learnt of my illness, was; what do I intend to do with my pregnancy.

Every doctor, family member, or friend I had, save my oncologist, urged me to terminate my pregnancy and approach this battle unhindered by any constraints, so as to unburden my body, which will have to endure the stresses of surgery and chemotherapy; extreme challenges by themselves, to say nothing of the strains of pregnancy, best described in the Quran as being {hardship upon hardship}(Sura: 31/14).

It seemed that the more people cared for me, the louder and more earnestly they tried to persuade me to give up my unborn child; you have another child; sound and well, you can become pregnant again in the future, your life is our sole concern, and we don't want to lose you for the sake of this embryo.

Why continue on this path, which only complicates matters for your doctors, limits your options, and renders your treatment less effective; why this sheer stubbornness, they asked.

Yet, I withstood this pressure relentlessly; as if answering an inner calling to hold that course, that is, until the day came for reappraisal after my surgery; when my oncologist came to me with the dreaded news: that the tumor is more widespread and more invasive than previously anticipated, and told me, for the first time since I began my treatment, that perhaps it is time to reconsider my decision with regard to the pregnancy.

I shuddered at that thought, above all, because my oncologist, who had assured me all along that my pregnancy will not undermine my treatment, has retracted his confidence, and he now believes that continuing with my pregnancy will limit my options heavily. However, what hurt me most was the fact that, with every new doctor visit, I was reminded that leaving behind two orphan children is worse than leaving one, and that it is unwise to deprive my existing son of his mother, for the sake of an unborn child, and so on.

I felt that the time had come for me to think objectively; why am I so unwavering when it comes to this issue; even though it was neither planned, nor was I extraordinarily delighted when it came? Why then, do I show such

dogged tenacity on seeing it through? So I began by contemplating the more selfish reasons; for one, this baby, despite weighing on me physically, provides me with a cogent incentive to persevere, nourish myself, and maintain high spirits against all odds; since this body does not belong exclusively to me. It also represents a positive side to my ordeal; a light at the end of the tunnel, if you will; that I shall survive this experience having lost a part of my body to surgery, and my hair and my strength to drugs, I shall nonetheless gain a small child, who had shared with me this hardship, in illness and cure; a child whom I believe would be proclaimed among the pious by God Almighty, for he would have witnessed my most transcendent moments; those of nearness to God, supplication, and sincere prayer.

And, what is more, how can I surrender to the notion that my pregnancy and its consequent constraints on my treatment options will truly affect my life and disease outcome, whilst I proclaim my total reliance on God, and believe that both doctors and drugs are mere means to realize God's cure.

Are we permitted to take the life of a being, though not graced with the sacred human spirit yet; even if he only possessed a nonhuman spirit prior to the one hundred and twenty day mark agreed upon by Muslim scholars. Had we deemed this being a lesser creature than man, do we have the right to strip him of his life unawares; is it moral to invade the sanctum, break his bones, and drag him out; piece by piece, for the alleged purpose of prolonging the life of his mother.

Because, do we actually have the means of prolonging life; even by a single day? And had God willed that the tumor shall respond to cure, would this pregnancy have prevented His Will?

On the other hand, had God willed that the tumor shall not be amenable to treatment, and that my life shall end at a determined day and hour; known only to Him Almighty, would we have been able to change His Will; by killing this poor, helpless being; even before it is graced with God's Spirit.

Isn't he/she a living creature, with a beating heart, eyes, ears, and a finger to suck on; just like any other child? Does he/she not have a brain and nerves, though not yet fully developed, which give him the faculty of feeling pain, like every other poor animal being?

For all those reasons, I am unable to take away his/her life deliberately.

Having said this, I ask God, if He deems concluding my pregnancy in the best interest of my baby and mine, that He bring it to an end by His Subtle

Hand, and that I am not reduced to making such intolerable a choice by myself.

The Magic of Gratefulness

I am at hospital in preparation for chemotherapy; undergoing a simple procedure under local anesthesia, to insert an intravenous catheter.

Even though I would not be subjected to general anesthesia, and this minor operation was to be done as early as 11.00 am, I was nonetheless asked to fast. However, not only did I wait for my operation until 4.00 pm, I was also informed by the nurse that my fasting had been unnecessary.

To make matters worse, three different nurses attempted to insert an intravenous cannula into my arm, to no avail, which demonstrated a lack of experience, I would have thought, because I am confident that my veins are not that hard to find.

A number of nurses debated for hours; whether to give me an intravenous antibiotic or not, as there was no doctor available to settle the matter.

However, when a doctor did finally arrive, he was only a junior doctor, who was quite unfamiliar with the procedure at hand, and to my dismay, his answers to my questions were becoming increasingly conflicting, until he opted to consult the senior doctor, who came to me with utterly different answers. In the meantime, as my husband and I were growing extremely annoyed at the apparent incompetence and poor service we were witnessing, he asked me if we should leave this hospital for a better one; especially since we were in Boston; home to some of the best hospitals in America. Yet, I wondered whether there was truly a better service somewhere else, or maybe the health service was decaying everywhere.

There are many people who face death from trivial illnesses while deprived of a doctor, or parents who witness the agonizing passing of their child, who are too destitute to afford treatment, or live in war-torn countries.

Nevertheless, amid this dark cloud of frustration, I was thankful to God who provided me with this health service which is not perfect, that many people do not avail.

Chemotherapy in a New Perspective

As my first chemotherapy draws near, various concerns seem to surface in my mind; how will this affect me, and how will it affect poor Maryam; the name I gave the small being in my womb. Will I become bedridden, will I be unable to eat, and will I lose my hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows, as the doctors anticipate?

Will I go through the agony of infections; brought on me by my depressed immunity, will I be forced to stay in hospital, will drugs change my features or the color of my skin, and will I be reduced to an ashen shadow of a life.

The more I came to know of the consequences of chemotherapy, the bleaker my prospect seemed to me, still, I was intent upon facing this inevitable part of my ordeal head-on.

One day, a dear friend of mine arranged for me to meet a former cardiologist, who had decided to resign his thirty year old career and dedicate himself to supporting cancer patients.

I did not have the desire to see him initially; doubting that I would gain anything new from such a visit, were it not for the sake of my friend who had made the arrangement. However, once I went there, I was truly grateful that I did.

I found a man with profound understanding and sincere empathy. And since our discussion lasted for several hours, I discovered that this person; Jewish by birth, had a deep appreciation of the earnest bond one can have with God.

We began by discussing the issue of chemotherapy, as it was the eve of my first encounter with it.

- What are your feelings on chemotherapy? He asked.
- Well, some people told me that I had to pray fervently to God, to make the tumor disappear, so I wouldn't need this wretched drug, but my personal feeling is that such would not be what God wants, I feel that I must endure this bitter, harsh experience, as part of my quest to find God's path.

His reply was confounding;

- Why do you feel that God must "scrub you hard to cleanse you", why do you think you must endure this chemotherapy to be closer to God, or to shine, glow, and spread your light onto those around you? You already are a gleaming pearl; not in need of a scrub to be brilliant.

I agree that God wants us to pursue the means of cure; not rely on mere wishes, and that for you; taking those drugs is a must, to make your utmost effort in your struggle with this tumor, however, isn't God able to spare you the torment of this therapy, so that you do not suffer through it?

- Yes, but...

- Listen, I always advise my patients not to see chemotherapy as a befalling calamity, or a poison they must endure; an enemy that will wither their bodies and deprive them of their wellbeing and joy, because, in the end, it was made for your benefit; to kill the cancer, so, wouldn't it be better for you to receive it with a sense of gratitude towards God; that He created this drug and made it a means for cure.

This was the first time I had come across such a perspective, because I had always thought of chemotherapy as an inseparable part of my ordeal, which had to be faced with stoicism.

- You must gladly accept your chemotherapy, and even talk to it; tell it that I am happy that God made you for me, and that you may enter my body, with God's Power vested in you, and do what was intended for you to do: destroy every last vicious cancerous cell, and spare the rest of my body unharmed, as well as my daughter, since, both you and I are God's creations, and must abide by His Will.

As he spoke, I recalled the story of Uqba Binnafi'i, who marched with his army into unfamiliar territory during his conquest of Africa, and found it rife with lions; he said "We are the army of the Prophet Muhammad, and we have come to subject this land to God's rule, thus, I ask you in God's name; who is both your Lord and ours, to leave us be, and not harm us". No sooner did he finish his speech than people saw the lions carry their cubs in their mouths and leave; allowing them to cross the river in peace.

I was amazed at hearing such profound meanings of gratitude towards God and reliance on His power, and I felt able to replace my abominable, negative energy with a positive one. I felt a strong pity for every cancer patient who is unconscious of such meanings; who underwent his

chemotherapy burdened with a feeling of sorrow; as if facing his imminent doom.

Divine Messages

Our Lord is defeated by nothing; He is neither powerless to physically annihilate a few powerless cells, easily crushable with the fingertips under the microscope, nor is He powerless to command that they "Be no more", just as He commanded them to "Be".

However, the issue at hand is not one of divine Power, but divine Providence: does the annihilation of those cells provide my wellness; both in this life and the next? What purpose would it serve for me: to have more of life, or is it the mere desire to live regardless; {You will find them, of all mankind, the most eager for life}(H. Quran: 2/96), any life, even one devoid of meaning, accomplishment, giving, or spiritual growth.

Consequently, should I want to ask Him for cure and longevity, I had better ask of Him to make me more beloved and nearer to Him, and more devoted to the benefit of others, otherwise, my passing would, by far, serve my greater good.

Perhaps, the message inferred from the providence of the Merciful Lord is: my servant, you are headed in the wrong path, hence, I halted you, so that you may either tread the path for which I created you; the path in which I will rid you of your misery and grant you a longer life; one which will draw you ever nearer to Me and will allow you to transcend ever higher till you achieve my company, or, if that path proves too arduous for you, or the veil on your eyes proves too heavy for you to find that path, then return to me and I shall spare you the torment of being astray, for your illness has cleansed you of your sins, and my Mercy shall embrace you. Linger no more in this life of bewilderment, which is unworthy of you.

I cannot but feel that my supplication and my crying insistence upon cure and longevity is a sign of narrow-mindedness, because is it wise on my part: to occupy myself with the incessant pleas for cure, instead of concerning myself with the pursuit of that wisdom which underlies my affliction. Is it prudent of me to preoccupy myself with the appeal for cure, like a child who is denied a treat by his mother for the sake of teaching him a lesson, yet, he

spends his time crying relentlessly for it, instead of asking himself why he was denied it, and what does she want from him, because had he done that for one moment, she would have given him all the sweets in the world, and never denied him anything.

My mother is one of the strongest women I know. She is truly one with an iron will and full of faith. I feared for her greatly from the news of my illness, yet, she amazed me when we first spoke on the phone; she said "God is kind towards His worshipers, and when He ordains He shows kindness".

One day, when she came to be with me in America, I told her how I had read that women with cancer endure the hardest part of that experience; not the burden of tests, surgery, or radiation, but the loss of their hair, which symbolizes the loss of their femininity.

When I told her this fact, she only said; "yes, but only for a short while, then everything returns to normal", and I felt from her response that she didn't quite appreciate my worry, because I was only a few, short days away from chemotherapy; when I would most likely lose my hair a week later.

She spoke with a practical tone; "there are solutions for this issue, so let's search for them; wigs, hats, head scarfs, artificial eyelashes, drawn eyebrows, every problem has a solution". We searched the internet; amused at some of the more nonconventional solutions we found, but when I left her alone for a few moments, I came back to find her wiping away her tears; she had been displaying this attitude of resilience for my sake; to abate my worries, when all along, I had believed that she drew her fortitude from a sense of apathy.

Your kicks, my little baby, are tidings of hope and delight; sent from the depths of my body; at a time when I feel most in need of hope and delight.

It is confounding to me; how more assured and less worried I feel, even compared to the time before my illness, whilst there are so many reasons to be concerned, not the least of which is my unawareness to the spread of the tumor; because exposure to radiation is not an option at this time in my pregnancy.

Glory be to God, who bestowed on me this sense of reliance on Him and reassurance with everything He does and ordains, to the point where all the

reasons for concern invoked by doctors, and every issue in life, seem but trivial matters, and where everyone I know; regardless of their apparent power to influence the course of my life, seem but helpless slaves to God; incapable of inflicting even the slightest of impact, without the permission and aid of their master and Lord of Power and Majesty.

So, what cause can there be for worry, when everything is in His Hands, and what reason would there be to pursue the approval of people; be they to give or deny you, when He alone is the Owner of every form of wealth; wellbeing, riches, knowledge, and happiness; all of which held in His Hand; under His Power.

A few months ago, I went to Disney World for a one week trip; carrying both, my unborn baby and my tumor; unaware of either. Shrouded in ignorance, my only concern at the time was which attraction we ought to see and which ride we ought to enjoy.

How limited human knowledge proves to be.

What calling drives a stranger to knock on my door, and offer me a bottle of water from the well of Zamzam (from Makkah), saying "My daughter, drink from this water, for it has been blessed with prayers. Drink and find cure with God's Will". What motive invokes such charity, when Zemzem water in America is a rare commodity. Why not keep it for herself, or gift it to a relative. Glory be to God, who sent down mercy and compassion onto the hearts of mankind.

The Mountain Resort and the Leisure Pursuits Therein

On my way to a three-day congregation for cancer patients in a nearby state.

A sense of unease washed over my husband, and me for that matter, since I only stumbled across the advertisement in the waiting room at hospital; "A weekend at a mountain resort for cancer patients; all inclusive, at no cost", and when I submitted our reservation online, no documentation was required whatsoever, and I was immediately provided with the venue address and program. We are not accustomed to the notion of free services in America, hence, we worry that this entire trip would end in some sort of a swindle, or worse; that we would find this "resort" no more than a few tents scattered in the wilderness, or some bug-ridden cabins. Nevertheless, we decided to venture out; our credit cards at our fingertips, to book at the nearest hotel if need be.

The scenery was picturesque as we approached this small, scarcely populated, quiet town, atop a vast, green mountain, with its omnipresent purling streams and babbling brooks.

At first sight of the hotel, the splendor of a small army of volunteers caught our attention, as they greeted every guest with a warm smile, while assisting them to their parking spaces.

The hotel seemed too exuberant with grandeur for such a small town, and our free accommodation turned out to be an entire suite with a mountainside view. It was almost too hard to believe that hundreds of patients were afforded such luxury at the expense of some philanthropic benefactors.

However, when we went down to the main exhibition hall, we finally came upon the patron behind this generosity; the hall was filled with an exposition from dozens of sponsor corporations; because, ultimately, a cancer patient is a customer who must be catered for.

I was astounded by the sheer variety of products and services made available to cancer patients; hospitals promoting their oncology departments and boasting the quality of their services, in order to entice customers.

Providers of alternative medicine publicized their treatment solutions, substantiated by scientific data; from acupuncture, to yoga, water therapy, tai chi, and a peculiar few of which I had not heard before.

Crash courses in cooking were held to advocate anticancer nutritional options. Clothes, hats, and colorful ornaments of every kind were also at display; carrying different slogans of support.

Beauty and skin care products were exhibited too, together with the presence of beauty experts, specialized in caring for cancer patients who undergo chemotherapy; offering them their every need of wigs, artificial eyelashes, and drawn eyebrows.

Underwear of every kind was at display; even a special swimwear for women who underwent mastectomy.

However, the recreation I admired most, was at a club specialized in Equine-assisted therapy; wherein the interaction with the horses alone, without horse riding, is adequate to promote patient improvement.

We were dumbfounded at the wide assortment of services at display, as we lamented the limited imagination of profit and nonprofit projects alike; founded in Arab countries, which seem to revolve around the same recurring themes; a workshop, sewing machines, bridal garments, or a mall; with little or no regard to the needs of countless social groups, which could constitute a vast source of revenue, and a potential customer base to quality services. Alas, it seems nobody has the courage to venture into unfathomed business prospects, which would benefit investors and consumers alike.

As we were browsing through the exhibition, Latin music was being played in the gardens, and when we went out to take a look, we found it to be a free class in Zumba: a Latin American dance which promotes energy and fitness, but to our greater surprise, we found that all the participants were septuagenarians; dancing, and enjoying themselves; allowing themselves the opportunity to live a normal life, and refusing to resign to a life which has seemingly reached its expiration; due to age and illness; a life only fit to receive sympathy and prayers.

Why Cancer, Amid My Pregnancy?

I was trying to discern a facet of the divine Wisdom that destined me to endure cancer amid my pregnancy; why did this gestation become such an obstacle in the path of diagnosis and treatment; to the point where we are reduced to treating the tumor blindly; without knowing the extent of its spread and the stage it has reached; fearing that we might bring radiation harm to the baby through any diagnostic procedure. As I contemplated these facts, I reminisced on the time I became pregnant.

I recalled the tears I shed when I first knew of my pregnancy, and the deep dejection I felt which verged on anger, because it had come at a time which could not have seemed any worse from my perspective; it was the start of my preparation for specialty, my schedule was grueling, and I could barely care for my three year old son as it is, whom I could not see for two days at a time.

I had to pressure myself in order to come to terms with this development, and I assumed that, somehow, it would be for the best. However, whenever I broke the news to my family and friends, I did so with a somber tone, as if expecting to be consoled by them, and in fact, they did console me; "God help you", "God destined, and He does as He wills, so be patient". I prayed in despair that God grant me forbearance and aid, as I did not realize the blessing which this pregnancy concealed; I did not feel due gratitude for the health and wellness, which both the baby and I enjoyed. I overlooked God's Grace, and failed to show due joy towards His immense blessing. Instead, I received the tidings of my coming child as I would a calamity which will hinder my career prospects; a potential hardship which must be met with patience and fortitude, and those feelings of discomfort haunted me until my true ordeal befell me, to wit, until the true blessing became manifest.

Glory be to God, who can change people in an instant. When I first knew of my cancer, I received the news with a greater sense of sufferance than I did the news of my pregnancy only a short while earlier. When I knew of my cancer, I did not think of it as an obstacle on the path of my career, but a total life changer; one that will put me back on the right track, both in this life and the Hereafter.

When I knew of my cancer, my career and professional accomplishment became my last concerns, as I tried to pierce through their veils, and to recognize the purpose behind my work and study: to proceed towards God and gain His company, and to bring benefit to His servants, as we draw them further towards His Grace.

When I knew of my cancer, I realized that my fret over the future was an act of sheer folly, for no one knows if they will make it till tomorrow or not, hence, to burden oneself with worry and lament the weight of life is but a sign of doubt in the immense graciousness, greatness, and power of the Lord, who never assigns further burden to His servant, without imparting due strength.

What If My Illness Had Been Mental, Not Physical?

Thank God; as soon as I became ill, everyone I know overwhelmed me with compassion, prayers, and support, and filled me with a firm confidence in my potential cure.

However, regretfully, not every patient receives such embrace in our societies. For instance; what if my illness had been mental, not physical, like an acute depression with a tint of delusion.

What if I had acquired a depression that reduced me to social withdrawal; having lost my capacity to work for no apparent physical reason, and spending my days recumbent in bed, ridden with dark thoughts that steadily sink into mythical delusions of fictitious murder or fabricated mayhem.

What would people think of me then; my family and friends, or my colleagues at work. I delude you not, for I have witnessed firsthand such an ordeal by a friend, but you can imagine the frightful situation nonetheless.

As for the loved ones, their first concern, I am sure, would be to find some sort of rational explanation to fathom the illness; like an evil eye, an act of witchcraft, or demonic possession; keeping the patient hostage to exorcists to expel this supposed spirit.

Whereas, the patient's more distant contacts; his acquaintances and colleagues, will no doubt blame none other than the patient himself; dispensing such clichés as "you must be optimistic", and "be a man, and don't say I'm depressed", or they may pass judgment and say "he has always been weak, that's why he couldn't bear the hardships of everyday life", or "that's what you get for abandoning the Quran, so always recite it"; in an endless jumble of baseless assumptions and incitement of further anguish in a patient already ridden with a deep sense of guilt being part of his illness, while overlooking the fact that mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorders are ailments, not different from my own ill health, though, cancer threatens the continuation of life, while mental diseases undermine the quality of life, unless the victim resorts to suicide, God forbid. Moreover, such psychological afflictions usually result from a wider, more interlaced assortment of genetic, biological, and environmental factors, not to

mention that victims of mental illness are in dire need of support, not blame, from their loved ones.

I urge everyone concerned to show patients of mental diseases utmost compassion; even if it was only a fraction of the kindness we give to patients with cancer.

How You Can Starve Cancer by What You Eat

What has befallen us in this day and age? It seems that not a single day passes without hearing of a new case of cancer amongst the people I know; a young man in his twenties with a testicular tumor, a young woman of twenty one had a tongue cancer, a ten year old child with leukemia, and an eight year old boy passed away with cancer of the brain. What on earth is happening? Why were things so different fifty years ago? And why is this wretched disease spreading like a plague, and claiming the lives of family and friends one after the other.

Dr. William Lee; speaking at an inspiring TED talk says: we advise people not to eat certain foods and to avoid certain activities, in order to stay healthy and prevent illness, but why don't we advise them on the types of food they should eat to prevent and fight cancer, and to preserve their wellbeing. Because, in the end, our food can represent the anticancer medicine we consume three times a day.

And I totally agree with this approach, because the notion of avoidance always constitutes a burden; no sooner does one decide to avoid junk food than find himself craving for its choices; a desire you may find so powerful, that it may thwart your entire resolution, which is why nutritional diets often begin on the next day; that tomorrow, which seems never to arrive.

Every cancerous cell that forms in the body; even in people without a tumor, requires a circulation to provide it with the nutrition necessary for its growth, multiplication, and consequential formation of a potentially lethal tumor. In this regard, certain types of food have been scientifically proven, through authentic research, not sheer hearsay, to foil the process of "angiogenesis" or the creation of new blood vessels by an emerging tumor, thereby causing those cells to starve. The following is a golden list of foods which can be added to our everyday meals:

- Red grapes, strawberries, blackberries, and cherries
- Oranges, lemons, and apples
- Turmeric, and nutmeg
- Green and Earl Grey tea
- Garlic
- Tomatoes
- Olive oil
- Dark chocolate
- Parsley

This list of foods, which has been experimentally researched in terms of their effect on the cells of blood vessels, has been proven to inhibit angiogenesis by as much as 80%, when a mixture of more than one extract was used as infrequently as a single time, hence, you can use more than one ingredient on any given day. However, we do not claim that this list is the only means of combating cancer, but that this is one viable method; by depriving cancerous cells of blood supply and nutrition. Furthermore, other types of food can prevent cancer via other methods; such as antioxidants and detoxifiers, which help the liver to rid our bodies of the toxins we ingest in our foods, like preservatives, and artificial colors and flavors. Accordingly, I urge readers to search for such types of foods and add them to their daily meals, not only for the sake of better health, but to carry out the duty of God's entrustment to us; that of our bodies.

Incidentally, the full version of the aforementioned TED talk is available on YouTube under the title: Can we eat to starve cancer?

My Spring and Hers

The first impression that springs to mind upon one's initial glimpse of that sight is the bare branches; still mere wood and boughs, unlike its kin, it had yet to blossom and bloom, and its sprouts had yet to bud. However, a more meticulous look will surely unveil its latent splendor and quiescent munificence. Its trunk seemed stronger than those of its twins, and its stems teeming, thick, and entangled; reminiscent of great wisdom and innumerable experiences.

Such captivating beauty hid amidst its bleak aspect, and such firm steadiness its seemingly deep, extensive roots imparted.

I perceived unrivaled magnificence, awaiting its due time to sprout leaves of green, fruits, and bounty, though, such a time is yet to come. I wonder: does she feel envious of her kin; those whose fewer stalks are less entwined, whose roots only shallow beneath the soil, and who cannot compare to her allure, but who had blossomed and bloomed just the same, while she still dallies.

I imagine not, for she knows well her essence, she realizes what immense, veiled bounties God has in store for her, and she is aware that when it comes to God's Grace, delay in time is meaningless.

We still await our springtime; she and I, to blossom and fruit, granted, ours may differ from that of other beings.

Be that as it may, each one of us has his own springtime, if only we show some patience.

Bothersome Speculations

I was able to overcome the grief of my illness since the earliest of days, and my affairs were much less trying than would appear to a spectator, thanks to God. Besides, as months went by, I managed to cope with my challenges on a day to day basis; I would neither worry over the future, nor mourn the past.

Nonetheless, only one matter kept disrupting my sense of placidity; hospital visits, since, each time I interacted with a new acquaintance; be they a nurse, a doctor, a medical student, or a technician, they always seemed to rekindle my feelings of sorrow; whenever one of them sheds a tear, or shows affection. They start to ask me questions, which I willingly answer, seeing their genuine concerns, but not until they try to console me that I feel truly sad; "Wow, what you have been through is too much for one person to bear", "Three months of chemotherapy, Oh my God, how difficult that must be; to fight cancer while caring for a child and carrying another, then will come giving birth and caring for the newborn; you must be under tremendous pressure".

And despite my sincere gratitude towards their genuine concerns and humane emotions, I cannot help but wonder at their unshakable assumptions, which leave no room to consider that matters may not be that grim from my perspective, that I may have a high morale, or that I may actually be living an almost normal life. What is truly upsetting is their presumption that I must undoubtedly be perturbed, indignant, frustrated, or miserable.

I am further annoyed by my own sense of reserve, which curtails my ability to express my true state of mind. Instead, I respond only with a smile, tell them that I feel fine, and let them be, together with their assumptions.

And Then, Maryam Arrived

Maryam has come, alongside a wealth of beneficence, mercy, and godsend from a Gracious Lord.

She came in full health, contrary to the wariness of many; proving that God's providence is far above all hopelessness, and that He is defeated by nothing.

She arrived after some months; wherein I used to speak to her without seeing her. We shared moments of sickness, surgery, and chemotherapy together, wherein she was the best of companions in my support.

Her spirited kicks within me always replenished my hope of a new life that would soon emerge into my world; aspirations which could not have come at a more appropriate time; when every other signal my body related to me was one of anguish and sorrow.

Nevertheless, my joy in her arrival was somewhat incomplete, as I felt a sense of guilt for failing to nurse her, given that I resumed my chemotherapy just two weeks after delivery. Nursing a child not only provides the nutrition necessary for her wellbeing and immunity against illness, but also, and perhaps more importantly, establishes an ineffable relationship, built on rapport, and affinity.

For instance, despite my indescribable love for Maryam, I clearly recall that my affinity for her brother, whom I nursed without supplementary bottle milk when he was her age, was far more heartfelt and intense, because by nature, breastfeeding impels a mother to attend to her child ceaselessly; on every hour of every day; the way God intended, as their physical bonding conveys the mother's warmth to her child, and the child's love to his mother, and as their gazes meet, for hours on end, their eye contact becomes their most potent form of expression, in the most singular relationship in the universe; wherein, each one of them understands the other completely, without the need to utter a single word.

That is why I am confounded to this day by mothers who deny themselves this miraculous godsend, though one which sometimes may seem too demanding to bear; sacrificing the most sublime attribute of motherhood; abandoning her child to a carer, while she spends her time in

the company of relatives or friends.

In Hospital, Speak Good or Keep Silent

One of the hardest times I endured was at hospital, during my delivery, even though it should have been a joyous occasion, for I had just received God's gift; a healthy and well Maryam, with whom I shared my illness and treatment for months, yet, the medical staff attending to me managed to ruin my joy unawares.

Each day, I would make the acquaintance of new faces; nurses, nurse assistants, and doctors. They would read my medical file before coming into my room, only to shower me with some of the worst remarks, though in good intention: "how unfortunate", "this is too much for one person to handle", or "this sucks". Someone else would tell me "since you nursed your first baby, it should have protected you from cancer. This isn't fair", and I would have to tell them, time and again, that my situation is better than it seems, that I am well, and that God does nothing without purpose, until I felt suffocated from the negative messages I was subjected to; at a time when I was at my most vulnerable; after an arduous labour. And so, I decided to leave hospital early; after spending only two nights instead of five. I felt poisoned by their negativity, the while they thought they were doing me a favor.

As I write these words now, and recall those past days, I intend to convey a special message to my colleague doctors and medical workers;

"Speak good, or keep silent".

Since I didn't carry a sign on me, announcing that I'm a doctor, nor was I keen that everyone knew this fact when I resided in hospital, I came to know an appalling pattern of disregard shown by doctors for their patients' choices.

Prior to delivery, I was slightly anemic from chemotherapy, and when I raised the issue with my oncologist; whether I would need a blood transfusion before I go into labour, he told me that this would be unlikely, unless I experience severe bleeding during childbirth.

Upon delivery, my blood test results showed a slight deterioration, which, according to the obstetrician, did not warrant a transfusion. However, the next day, I heard a knock on my door, only to find the nurse telling me that I had to take another blood test.

What is it for, I asked.

A blood count for anemia, she said.

Well, no one had informed me of the test, and since we had only performed the count yesterday, and I had not suffered any bleeding since, I decline the test, thank you, I replied.

Moments later, the on call doctor came into my room, attempting to convince me to take the test. I told her that a change from yesterday's result would be highly unlikely, and that no decision would be built on the new reading, especially when I had no intention of receiving a blood transfusion, because I do not feel lethargic, and I do not have palpitation; the hallmarks of severe anemia. Therefore, this test would only serve to waste time and money.

At this point, the doctor set out on a bizarre quest of persuasion, unaware that I am a doctor.

Her first move was one fraught with error; she said "since you took plenty of fluids yesterday, this may have improved your anemia a little, but seeing that you had no fluids today, your hemoglobin may have dropped"; a statement that totally contradicts scientific facts, because excess fluids dilute the blood and worsen anemia, not improve it. However, I contained my remarks and did not point out her mistake, for fear of embarrassing her. I only said that I would not retake the test merely to indulge curiosity, especially when it will not change my treatment; for I do not wish to receive blood.

Once more, she seemed determined to give false medical advice; telling me that my anemia could endanger my heart and compromise it with complications.

This, my dear, is for people who suffer from preexisting conditions and old age, not a woman in her thirties with a sound heart. Besides, my anemia has been with me for months now, since I first took chemotherapy, and my body has long become accustomed to it. Furthermore, we do not treat "test results", but "patients", and here I am, sitting before you, neither feeling lethargic, nor having palpitations, and feeling better than I did during pregnancy to boot.

Feeling stranded, she turned to my husband, whom she knew to be an anesthesiologist, and said: "Doctor, you persuade her please. Tell her that, from an anesthesiology perspective, this bears harm to her health".

Those last words of hers truly irked me; to involve my husband in a decision that is solely mine, and to patronize me by implying an anesthesiology standpoint to her opinion, which is quite the contrary.

I smiled and said: Incidentally, I too am a doctor, and know well enough how to make my own decision.

Only then, did she stop in her tracks.

However, I kept wondering about all the other patients; do they not have the right to choose for themselves, especially when medicine is thick with unsettled matters, upon which doctors disagree and studies dispute. So, why must a doctor impose his views on his patients and narrow their choices.

In fact, what takes place in our Arab countries is much worse. In our social contexts, a doctor considers his advice as sacred as revelation; denying the patient any right to debate, expand, or enquire, not to mention the right to differ. Woe to him, he who dare express an objection, for only one fate awaits him; expulsion from the clinic. And many were the patients whom I saw expelled in my time as a student, for nothing more than to have been deemed too inquisitive, or to have quoted another doctor, with a second opinion.

These encounters notwithstanding, the prevailing practice I witnessed in America, from the majority of doctors who taught me, and from those who supervised my treatment, save a few inexperienced juniors, is that the role of the doctor lies in sharing his information with the patient, outlining the available options, and the advantages each option provides, and finally, mentioning his preferred course of action, and the basis on which he founded his opinion; without bias, and with utmost impartiality; leaving the final decision to his patient, after giving him sufficient time to consider,

This is how respect for freedom of choice ought to be. Because, as long as the body belongs to the patient, the right to decide must lie with him too. It is his choice.

An Exceptional Person and Humane Physician

I write these words as I receive chemotherapy, for I have decided to write about one of the truly remarkable people whom I had the privilege of meeting owing to my illness; my oncologist, who has thus far treated me.

An extraordinary individual, whom I wish I could clone and distribute to every hospital in our countries, so that all patients can find in him the joy I found in his acquaintance. Then again, perhaps my pen will be, in a sense, my way of cloning him, if only to portray to my colleagues in the medical profession how a doctor can be truly compassionate.

- Upon our first encounter; on the day I knew of my illness, he introduced himself with a broken Lebanese dialect, telling me that although his parents came from Lebanon, his command of Arabic did not extend beyond a few words. He intended to initiate our relationship on a foundation of rapport; implying that he was more to us than just a doctor.

- Every time we met, he would come into the room with a smile, chanting "Doctor Noor al-Bar, I am glad to see you"; showing me respect by addressing me by my title, and expressing such joy that you would think you were his favorite or only patient. How notable it is to show consideration for our patients, and not call them by a generic label, such as uncle or aunt, but address them as they wish to be designated, be it by their social or professional status, all the while showing courtesy and appreciation to a vulnerable person, at a time when he may feel stripped of his recognition or esteem.

- Each time I saw him, he had a word of praise to say to me; "You look wonderful", or "You are miraculous, undefeated even by the side effects of chemotherapy". After surgery he would say "wow, your mobility is great, and not even a few days after your operation", "I am thrilled by your rate of healing", or he would compliment me by saying "Everyone tells me you're looking splendid, and no one can imagine that you're on chemotherapy". To applaud a sick person with similar remarks costs little time, yet such praise

may be cherished by them; deriving from such recognition joy, reassurance, and strength; all of which paramount to the process of healing, as Avicenna said "Illness is one half delusion, while cure is one half certainty".

- He possesses an incredible ability to avoid mention of dispiriting words like death, relapse, and complications; focusing instead on the positive aspects of every situation. Try to imagine how difficult such an approach can prove to be, and the versatile talent it requires, especially when the person you are dealing with is not only a cancer patient, but someone who is at an advanced stage of their illness. Yet, he always manages to maintain transparency, without misleading his patients or giving them false hope.

For instance, instead of telling a person that her seven centimeter tumor is considerably large, he would say that in spite of the tumor being big, it is nonetheless not attached to the skin nor to the chest wall, which is a good sign.

Also, rather than telling the patient that without radiotherapy the cancer will relapse, he would say it has been proven through scientific research that radiotherapy increases the chance of full recovery.

Likewise, his alternative for warning a patient against the potential complications of chemotherapy, which can cause severe pain in the limbs, would be to inform them that most people may experience a mild tingling sensation, which will subside as soon as the treatment is over, and rarely does it become worse than that. Thus, every sentence he speaks is precisely structured; knowing that a patient will absorb every single word he utters, replay it in his mind, and turn it into a conviction.

Unfortunately, a great many doctors I know, even in America adopt a contrary approach. They would startle the patient with a long list of possible side effects and potential complications, some of which not even accurate. Take my surgeon for example; on the very day of my diagnosis, she disconcerted me with her doubts that I would never conceive again after chemotherapy; an opinion which proved to be unfounded, not to mention the complete inaptness of her timing.

- He exhibits a high level of flexibility in his approach to treatment; never applying a single regimen on all his patients, rather, he would consult the

most recent of studies available, and would often ask his patients for more time to search for a tailored treatment plan to match their needs. And since my case was by no means routine, given my pregnancy, he stretched this flexibility to the limits. For instance, my textbook plan would have entailed four doses of chemotherapy prior to delivery, which would have been scheduled early, to allow me time for further doses after giving birth. However, when I called him and indicated my reluctance to deliver a premature child, for fear that it would put my baby at risk, he asked me to grant him a week, while he searched for a solution, and he did. He proposed that we postpone delivery for three more weeks; taking a fifth dose of chemotherapy in the meantime, though modified by dropping one of the two drugs that may compromise my heart function late in the pregnancy. Furthermore, he did not neglect to explain the more convoluted options he found, and why he dismissed each one of them. He concluded by saying "You will not find this fifth dose in any textbook, as I customized it to suit your particular condition". What extraordinary accommodation this man possesses; one that all doctors need; founded on research and evidence, not personal partiality, unlike those who behave like robots; adhering to every word in the textbook rigorously, and without due consideration to their patient's unique circumstances and individual needs.

- His utmost respect for his patient's opinion is beyond compare, coupled with his prowess in persuasion if need be. I will give you one incident to prove my case. Before my operation, I was adamant not to be subjected to lymph node dissection, given its nasty consequence of limb swelling, which would only worsen over time, just as I refused to administer a radioactive substance into my body to track any lymph nodes potentially affected by the cancer, for fear of exposing my unborn child to the risk of radiation.

His initial response to my refusal wasn't that my decision is insane, or that such a course of action had never been taken before. Instead, he said "You may be right, and there may well be no justification for removing all the lymph nodes, at a time when chemotherapy has come such a long way, that it alone may be a sufficient means of cure, without surgery. However, at this time, we have no studies to support that claim, and you will be the first patient to tread that path. Perhaps this option will be substantiated within ten years from now, but the truth is, at this point in time, we just lack this piece of

information, hence, we cannot take the risk". He ceaselessly debated his case until we reached a compromise; that I would undergo an ultrasound scan of my lymph nodes, and in the event that they are found to be enlarged, I would consent to their removal. Thus, he was able to coax me into assenting to the procedure, without coercion, and without surrendering me to my misjudgment.

- In another incident, when the time came for me to decide between the continuation or termination of my pregnancy, he displayed astonishing forbearance, and even though it took me several weeks to reach a decision, he limited his involvement to the clarification of related facts, in order for me to weigh both sides of the argument. He even went so far as to provide me with the studies he came across, while researching the matter, and he left me with a door wide open for hope when he said "If you decide to continue your pregnancy, I am confident that we will find the solutions which will enable us to care for you and your child", whereupon, he let me be, to make my own decision. He never pressured me, nor pressed me for time, and he certainly did not attempt to impose his personal view upon my choice. He waited silently, as wise judgment dictates.

- After I had given birth, while still at hospital, he came on a surprise visit, and cheerful as always, he said in a loud voice "Doctor al-Bar, congratulations, congratulations". He had come to see my newborn, and congratulate me on my safe delivery, unwilling to settle for the mere role of oncologist.

My sole quest in committing these striking gestures to paper is to clone this remarkable bearing of a doctor, for the sake of our promising physicians to be, knowing full well that they are up to the task of reaching this summit of behavior, and surpassing it too.

Are You Ill

Some illnesses are far graver and more fatal than cancer; ailments that detach a human being from the source of munificence, clemency, and grace; maladies which we seem inclined to forget, or deliberately overlook, assuming they would not hamper our immediate lives, while we turn a blind eye to our eternal, perpetual existence.

Everyone I know seems to pray for my sake and wish me well, asking God for my cure from a life-diminishing sickness, that would cut my anticipated life by half; from sixty years to mere thirty; a sickness that would separate me from those who are dear to my heart, even though our parting of the ways is inevitable, sooner or later; a sickness that would ruin my body, even though my ultimate perishment is inescapable.

Yet, all of us seem to disregard those infirmities which deform our perpetual lives and sentence us to ruin, in our everlasting existence, and true being.

Too often have we taken the views of other people to heart; driven by them to do or give, while our deeds pass unrewarded by God and in vain.

Too often did we perceive ourselves more righteous and distinguished from other people, only to fall from grace, unawares.

Too often did we speak, write or tweet, and find conceit in our words or actions, only to confront the fact that the blessing of our deeds has been effaced; swept away like the spume of the sea.

Many a year did we spend in pursuit of an education, assuming that our efforts were for the good of the people, while our true purpose never rose above the furtherance of our own interests in this world, not the good of the people. Because, is there a bigger loss than to waste years in a life's work, only to find it an illusion at the end, when one finally meets his Lord; as it becomes unveiled that his deeds sought nothing but the acclaim of admirers.

Then you tell me that cancer is grave?

What harm can lie in these poor cells, which do no more than hasten the journey of a human being to his Lord. What danger does cancer possess, compared to those spiritual tumors which fritter away every good deed committed and strived for by man, in a matter of seconds, and by mere

ephemeral thoughts that are barely discernible, which render the most virtuous and benevolent of human beings a futile ruin.

The Prophet's saying frightens me to this day, when he recounts the first three kinds of people with whom the Fire is set ablaze; a supposed scholar, a supposed martyr, and a supposed almsgiver. As the scholar says "O God, I have learned and taught for Your sake", and God Almighty replies "Liar. You learned so that people call you learned, and thus they did. Throw him into the Fire".

Liar, you fought so that people call you courageous. Liar, you gave so that people call you generous. Throw them into the Fire.

I intend to convey a special message to all scholarship students and to seekers of knowledge and degrees, that the first part of that Prophetic saying concerns us all. How many among us have come such a long way, and parted from family, only to earn a title and a degree, and boast their education in America or Europe. Many are those who return home, only to declare the pretentious phrase "When I was in America". So beware, remember those with whom the Fire is first set ablaze, and reconsider your purpose promptly.

Death and I

One of the most burdensome realities forced upon a cancer patient is the fact that death is nearer than ever before, or so it may seem, as if the countdown of his life has commenced; urging him to make the best out of the remainder of his days, regardless of how many they may be.

However, the fact of the matter is, everyone ought to think this way, for many were the apparently healthy and well who ventured out of their homes, never to return, owing to an accident or sudden death. Whereas, people with cancer at least have the privilege of being on guard, vigilant not to be caught unprepared.

When it comes to the ways people deal with the notion of impending death, there are many. Some may prefer to shun their fears and turn a blind eye; living in hope, one day at a time, and evading ruminations about tomorrow. Yet, as easing as that may be, and as proper as it may seem for some people, I still feel that trailing that path will only squander my opportunity to realize the purpose for which everything had happened. The way I see it, one of the most pivotal meanings this "godsend" serves to accentuate, is that there is a set timer in motion, and that my time on earth is not endless; that I am departing, whether hastened by cancer or not, and either way, I must become aware of the fact that I do not belong here.

I am trying my best to appreciate death as a "happy" ending, because, did God not give me a forewarning, lest I be taken unwary? And had He willed, my life could have ended in a sudden accident, while I am infuriated by my shift from the previous night; when everybody retired from the ward, and left behind all their work for me to finish.

However, God willed that I be spared this vortex of emotions, in order to ready myself. Because, on reflection, if my end was to be one of Paradise and bliss; solely by God's Grace, then what reason could there be for me to fear death, and what could ever justify my worry over the result of a test, a radiograph, or a doctor's opinion; if at the end, I was to join a blissful gathering of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions, and every other pure, pious soul to ever tread on this earth to boot. I found immense comfort in these thoughts, which alleviated much of my dejection and

distress, since doctors could no longer unsettle me, because, as it turns out, the worst possible news is not that bad at all, rather, it is the beginning of a new, happier life. Even so, there was one final pain which seemed to render me in tears every time it came to mind; that my three year old son shall live motherless. I see my self succumb to tears unwittingly, whenever I look at him. Admittedly, my feelings towards my husband are by no means less intense, but I know that he will eventually overcome his grief and resume his life without me, and as for my parents, I am confident that their store of faith will aid them on their path, whereas my little son, I cannot but imagine the harshness of his future life without his mother. I recall once, as he sat beside me, fidgeting with my phone, he played a video recording of me and him feeding some sheep and goats on a farm. At that moment, I could not restrain myself from asking my husband not to erase my pictures from his phone, even though I know how much he detests gloomy thoughts.

Why, he responded curiously.

Do not erase them, because I would like for my son to get to know, and never forget his mother. Those words were too much for me to bear, and I broke into tears, only to receive a long talk from him on optimism and the unrelenting anticipation of the best from God.

Whatever drove me to write these words now, for they seem obscure beyond my profuse trickle of tears. Well, in any case, to recall death, and dare I say, to embrace it, is truly a consolation in the company of a Gracious Lord, even when such comfort may be cramped by this sorrow or that.

In This Frenzy of a World

Such an insane world we dwell in, wherein everyone seems to scurry, aimfully or aimlessly, in pursuit of something, and as they scuttle to their studies, work, livelihoods, or even their pleasures, they save no time to behold their humanness, to know themselves, or to heed their true essence and purpose.

Even those stray minutes which can be scavenged as we await a ride or an appointment have become overwhelmed by a stream of gossip and prattle on social media, or a gush of YouTube videos intended for amusement, and every individual seems "plugged" into a Smartphone that pours onto him an endless spout of trivial concerns, to fill up every moment of solitude he has, as if it had become too unbearable for a person to sit with himself, or that people have grown so aversive to their own being that they are in constant need of guests and newcomers to arrive into their minds, regardless of who those visitors may be. Oh-my, how awful it must be for someone not to tolerate his own inner self.

In this day and age, the practice of meditation, or the "contemplation of worship" if you prefer, promises to be a true salvation for us all; to dedicate but a few minutes of your day, to sit alone, in silence and serenity, untroubled by your thoughts on the world and its bustle.

To spend but a few minutes each day to come to know yourself, to find affability in your own quintessence, and to sense the profoundness of your own humanness.

In a special branch at Massachusetts General Hospital; the main teaching hospital at Harvard University, researchers are intent on exploring the effects of these moments of reflection on human beings, and thus far, their revelations are nothing short of miraculous.

Their impacts extend far beyond the improvement in a human's state of mind, or his immunity to anxiety and depression, to reach the physical realms of the human body too; lowering our blood pressure and heart rate, promoting our resistance to infections and autoimmune diseases, and even altering the genetic codes inside our white blood cells and the proteins they encode; all of which the result of a mere twenty-minute daily spell of meditation, the only

condition being that you sit in a quiet place without disruption, not even by buzzing phones in the backdrop, while focusing on only one word or meaning, repeating it constantly in your heart or with your tongue, and if any stray thought should occur to you during that time, say, where you will park your car, what you will have for lunch, or whether your email was answered or not, let it slip away gently from your mind, and refocus your attention on that singular meaning or word you were contemplating. This is what researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital say.

And now, allow yourself to imagine what it would be like if that singular meaning you recall was the invocation of the One God; who holds the power of this entire world in His Hand, and who is Able to bestow upon man the gifts of tranquility, serenity, wellness, livelihood, and anything else he may need.

How precious those minutes transpire to be; for your mind, troubled by the tumult of modern life, for your heart, burdened by apprehension, and for your body, desperate for time to repair itself and keep those grappling diseases at bay.

Is your true being unworthy of twenty minutes a day, to reach a far more satisfying life?

Hair Loss

- Mother, are you sad?
- Mother, are you sad?
- No, why do you ask?
- Are you about to cry?
- No, why do you ask?
- Because your hair is falling again.

I put on a smile as tears gathered in my eyes, astonished at my four-year-old's ability to remember an incident which had passed several months ago, when I first began chemotherapy.

My doctor had already warned me that I would lose my hair after the first dose of chemotherapy, and even though I felt distressed and dismal, I clung onto a shred of hope that I might be an exception to the rule. I attended my first session, and my hair seemed invincible from that day onwards, that is, until I reached day seventeen. I still remember what happened on that day very clearly; while I was bathing, I stroked my head with my hand, and my hair started to fall out heavily, and all of a sudden, I was swept into a state of panic, as my breaths became shallow, and my eyes sank in tears. What I dreaded was finally upon me.

It was not so much the amount of hair which had fallen that startled me as it signaling the beginning of the end for my beautiful hair.

I experienced a harrowing sense of helplessness; being too powerless to save the hair which I loved dearly as is. I regretted that I did not cut it myself, before it began to fall out, just as I had learned from many forums attended by cancer patients, who seemed to prefer cutting it by their own hands rather than leaving it to cancer.

Following that incident, and over the period of a whole week, much more of my hair continued to fall out. I recall that on the first day I was overcome with glumness, and that was when my son saw me crying and asked me about the reason behind my sadness.

I did not attempt to conceal my dejection from him, since this was perhaps the only side to my situation which he is able to grasp, and because I intended for him to learn to appreciate the feelings of other people, and to

realize that every person has the right to be sad once in a while, even his indomitable mother.

- I am sad because I am losing my hair, I told him. But if you were to give me a big hug I will feel better.

Over the next few days my self-pity had subsided, replaced by an overwhelming sense of indifference. What significance do some locks of hair hold? None. It was sheer absurdity. However, once my head seemed half bald, a feeling of exasperation struck me; an annoyance at my remaining hair, why wouldn't it just fall off and be over and done with.

At that time, I used to wear a bandana all day long, and with every ablution, I would try to pluck out some of my remaining hair, so that I may put an end to my sense of loss, helplessness, and pity.

Even though I did not allow anyone to see my bare head then, I used to show my husband the strands of fallen hair in my palm, to ready himself for the new look I was going to assume. I would tell him cynically "behold today's harvest".

As a week went by and only a few wisps of hair stood on my head, I was surprised by my husband who came from work to tell me that he missed the sight of my head, and that he wanted me to take off the bandana I was constantly wearing. I responded with an immediate, absolute refusal, because until that moment, my hair did not only represent a crucial element of feminine beauty from my perspective, but also a source of pride and dignity, and without it, I would appear frail from illness; a feeling which I could never entertain.

At that moment, he went into the bathroom, locked the door, and I heard the buzzing sound of the hair cutter.

- What are you doing in there, I called.

- A surprise, he answered.

He emerged a little while later with his hair completely shorn off.

- Why on earth did you do this, you loved your hair, I pleaded.

Minutes later, I too went into the bathroom and shore off what remaining strands of hair I had, and then, I summoned my courage, and I came out.

We broke into a fit of impulsive, simultaneous, choking laughter.

- Wow, what a small head you have, my husband said jokingly.

- Still, I'm very smart, just look how space-economical my head is. Whereas your head is too large, I retaliated.

- It's filled with football, play station games, and YouTube videos, that's why I need so much space, he said defensively.

- Look at that bump at the back of your head, I pointed out. It must be your GPS. That's why you're so competent with maps and directions.

We laughed endlessly, while our son was hovering around us yelling:

- Mum, Dad, what have you done?

And we found ourselves asking him in unison: would you like to have your hair cut too? "No thank you" he replied fervently.

It was from that day onwards, that I never saw the need to hide the sight of my bald head from my family. I never required a wig nor a bandana at home, yet, I managed to preserve my pride and my air of toughness, despite that hairless head of mine.

None Has an Exclusive Right to God

Oddly enough, when I first learned of my illness, I wrote to my colleagues in America, informing them of the news and apologizing in advance for the long leave from work I will be taking, which will undoubtedly burden them with my workload. At the end of the letter, I asked those of them who believe in God to pray for me.

The first response I received was from a colleague who was Jewish by birth and social customs, but atheist in belief. He wrote in reply "I do not usually pray, and have not done so for a long time, but I will nonetheless pray for you", which I believed was a mere curtesy.

Another coworker answered, who was a homosexual, and whose sole purpose in his career was to empower every child and adolescent who wished to become openly gay, to do so without suffering social oppression, and who was an ardent speaker and demonstrator for that cause. He wrote back saying that he will attend church on Sunday, to pray for me specifically, which I found to be bizarre to say the least.

Then, a third letter came to me from a social worker whom I knew to be Jewish. She asked me to hold on until the coming Saturday, when she will be at the synagogue, attending a sermon, and she will pray for me there. Moreover, she would often call me, and offer to cook me some kosher meals; a food that satisfied the requirements of Jewish religious law.

As for the Head of my department, who also happened to be Jewish, he sent me a lengthy letter, advocating faith in God, and arguing for the just balance between Divine Mercy and Justice, while proving how God's Mercy always takes precedence over His Justice, which I found to conform to Islamic belief. At that moment, I gathered from all these messages that no one has an exclusive right to God; contrary to common belief, I recognized that God's door is wide open to anyone who possesses a breath of spirit within him, and that it is we, and none other, who try to shut God's door in the face of His seekers, place obstacles on their path, and have the audacity to assume that we alone have access to God Almighty.

Last week, I went to speak about the influence of faith on healing. I recounted my own experience and expressed how immense a blessing it is to

find God in one's life. Among the thoughts I presented in that talk was that God Almighty is the Lord of all human beings, regardless of faith or race, that He is Lord to the feeble and the hurt, irrespective of their name, color, or religion, and that He alone has an ever open door, on every hour of every day. To approach Him, you need neither call a secretary nor take an appointment, and all you have to do is call on Him to find Him by your side.

No sooner did I end my speech than a nun stood among the audience, her eyes teary, and she said "my faith grew stronger today as I listened to your words, and I feel that the room we occupy now has turned into a part of Paradise, surrounded by angels from every side. I thank you in particular for not confining this divine gift within one religion or race, and for including us all, to share with you this unique experience. You have opened for us a door towards a profound nearness to the One God, which is the cornerstone of faith and the core of theology; a belief unbridled by conditions and particulars, and founded upon a deep relationship between two parties; the human heart, and God's Mercy. Whereupon, she walked across the room and embraced me.

How to Eat an Elephant

There is only one way for anyone to eat a whole elephant, and that is one bite at a time. And just as no one can engulf an elephant with one gulp, neither can one solve the problems of the world all at once. And despite people's desire and enthusiasm for change, it does not happen instantly, especially when we tend to belittle or underestimate some of the effort required of us to exact that change.

I must make my hungry neighbor the starting point in my fight against global poverty, or the beggar at the street corner for that matter. Such is truly the beginning of change.

I am baffled at this inordinate ambition we possess, which drives us to entertain an unrealistic belief that we can suddenly become great achievers, radical reformers, or prominent figures.

What absurdity it is which compels us to squander our opportunities, and shut the doors which God unlatches for us from His exalted Throne, above the Seven Heavens; to disregard His Grace heedlessly, and to deem it unbecoming of our vanity. Because, upon consideration, it seems that our notion of the radical changes and the great feats we seek is rather chilling, for many are those among us who have been conquered by their own desire for fame, or sullied by their own egos.

Many a man has been offered a platform and followed by millions, only for his efforts to end up in vain, and fade like the spume of the sea. Whereas, many of the pure, pious servant, who relies on God's infinite Power, and bears a genuine, keen desire to bring about change, whom God endowed with the blessing of success, even when only a few chose to aid his pursuit. Thus he stood, like a firm tree, its trunk tall in the sky, yielding its bounties every season by the will of its Lord.

It is not so much a matter of sums, followers on Twitter, cheerers, or admirers, as it is an issue of the nature and profoundness of what you give, whereupon, it is entirely in God's Hand; He who opens the doors, spreads the message, and apprises, while never consigning sincere work to futility.

Adversity Swap

During the course of a training program on hypnosis held for psychotherapists and physicians, I had the privilege of meeting Luis and his wife Emmy. At first, I made Luis's acquaintance at one of the workshops, where the trainer had asked me about my purpose with hypnosis, and I replied that I wished to overcome some undesirable consequences of chemotherapy. As Luis was listening to my answer, he pulled up his chair closer to mine and asked me about my condition, and when I smiled and told him about my illness, he was very touched, and expressed his great admiration for what he called the patience and courage I exhibited despite the grave adversity I was facing.

At lunch time, he, his wife and I sat together among other attendants, where I learnt that Emmy had gradually lost her sight over the past few years owing to a hereditary illness. Despite her total lack of vision, she continued to care for her children, in addition to her work as a psychotherapist; the reason why she persistently strived to expand her knowledge and skills, attended training programs, and faced life in all its bustle with shut eyes. She had learnt to feed all her books and study materials into her computer through a scanner, so that they may be read back to her, she uses Siri on her smartphone to facilitate her everyday needs, and for a year now, she has been on the waiting list to obtain a service dog to assist with her means of transport, since her biggest challenge has long been her inability to find her way at the new places she must visit, hence, Luis always accompanied her on every step she took.

After lunch, when Emmy needed to go to the restroom, Luis asked me to help her, and I did. It was dismaying for me to realize how every single move we routinely make seemed so challenging to her; to know in which direction the door opens, to use the soap dispenser, to open the water faucet, to find the paper towels; every little detail was a potential trial. Finally, as we approached the stairs leading to the study hall, she said humorously "give me your shoulder, I only need a shoulder to find my way".

I was deeply moved, picturing the magnitude of the adversity which had befallen her and her husband, and I couldn't help but wonder at their

resilience and fortitude, not to mention their high spiritedness which gave them the strength to adjust to this calamity jointly.

A brief while later, a thought crossed my mind. What if I was asked to swap my condition with Emmy; taking her loss of sight, which is by no means life threatening, nor would it entail the exposure to chemotherapy or radiation, to say nothing of fear or worry, while giving her my cancer. Would I accept this trade.

I did not hesitate to answer, not for one moment. A strange feeling washed over me; that this cancer of mine seemed like a dear friend to me now, one which I would willingly take instead of the loss of my vision, which would render me in constant need of another person to chaperone me at all times.

Then again, I imagined what it would be like if that exchange was offered to Emmy and Luis, and I envisioned them calling out in one voice "A cancer, no thank you. Loss of vision is far lesser an ordeal than this persistent threat of departure from life".

My thoughts wandered off as I recalled all the troubled people I know; anyone with an adversity, be it big or small; a mental illness, divorce, the ailment of a child, and even marital discord, and I pondered over the decision I would make if I was offered the choice of swapping with any of them.

At that moment, I felt a strong love towards God Almighty, who knows me better than I know myself; how He tried each one of us with the test best suiting to the individual's character and ability, so that He may reward us with the prize earned by those who show patience. And I considered how difficult it would be for me to find myself in the shoes of somebody else, say, a woman with a mean husband, who would constantly remind me of my flaws; ruining my individuality and shattering my self esteem along the way. Because, although to many, this may seem preferable to having a ferocious, advanced cancer, it is far more taxing from my point of view, and I would very much doubt whether I can stand such trauma, while trying to accomplish and give to others at the same time.

Glory to His name, who doled out livelihoods to His servants as appropriately as he allocated their trials, knowing well and truly what befits each one of them, in this life and the Hereafter.

The Production Line

I am puzzled as to how I strayed from my closeness to God.

I am baffled as to how the achievements which would supposedly near me to Him became my sole focus and concern, instead of the relationship itself; how they replaced my inclination to commune with and confide in Him, or my readiness to shed my tears and express my emotions in His company.

Why did I, every time I broke the shackles of the production line which dominates my life, return to them by my own will.

Why did I recommit myself, time and again, to measuring my self worth by the number of books I read, the articles I write, the speeches I deliver, or the degrees I earn; mere lifeless markers, as evanescent as the spume of the waves.

I am perplexed as to why my work, accomplishments, and time management skills, deserve so much more of my attention than the enjoyment I find in them, or the proximity to God they merit.

I fail to understand why such meanings elude me so, or when I will finally grasp that life is not a lifelong race to the death.

When will I realize that one sincere respite before God may gain me years on my trek towards Him; more than a whole life in pursuit of meaningless attainments ever would.

Why The Rush?

One of my unflinching sources of wonder was my ceaseless urge to leap hastily from one phase in my life to the next. However, as I approach this particular period in my existence, I feel the desire to experience every moment of everyday, and even when my loved ones pray for my abrupt cure, or when they try to quicken my treatment to obliterate the tumor, I feel bemused at their hurry, because I feel no sense of urgency at all. From my perspective, if this chapter in my life shall end in a cure that would immediately throw me back into the hustle of work and the bustle of life, then I would prefer, first and foremost, to amass my supply of firm belief, better understanding, and a more profound sense of self, before being hurled back into the arena, so that I may return with a different view and a more

distinguished form of contribution. On the other hand, shall this time prove to be my last, and were I to return to the company of my Lord, then I will need, more than ever, to ready myself so as to stand before Him, appreciate my journey and value its wisdom, and take delight in my last remaining days, by spending time with my son before my departure. So, why the hurry, when those days are so exceptional that I may never find anything like them again.

The Badger and Mothers Nowadays

I was watching a documentary with my son, concerning a wild African animal, called the honey badger; a short-legged mammal that lives in burrows underground, and is hunted for its fur.

It was an amazing footage of a mother carrying her cub everywhere, as she looks for food. She is unable to leave it in the burrow, since no home is safe for a cub in the African Savanna. And during their search, the cub almost died of an illness that made his breathing shallow and faint, yet his mother continued to carry him with her, knowing full well that if she were to leave him anywhere, he would immediately become a potential prey for hundreds of hungry predators awaiting such an easy meal. She kept on carrying him until they encountered a male badger of their same species who showed an immediate desire to devour her young, whereupon she found herself thrust into a fierce encounter with him, so as to defend the already fragile life of the cub; an encounter after which the stronger male emerges triumphant, and scampers away as she is left behind, tending to her heavy wounds.

She was not foolish for protecting her cub. Yet, knowing that his death was imminent, and on the off chance that she does succeed, would he not have inevitably grown and left her; becoming her competitor for the means of survival. So, why take the risk of endangering her own life.

In the waiting room at hospital, I read in a magazine the story of a twenty two year old woman with ovarian cancer, who, despite her doctors' advice, refused to consent to the removal of both of her ovaries, since she did not want to forgo her chance to conceive. She underwent an operation to excise the affected ovary only, and set off on chemotherapy afterwards, until she was cured. Within five years, and during her visit to the doctor, she discovered that the cancer had returned to her then healthy ovary, and had reached a life threatening size of ten inches, exposing her once again to the perils of her former course of treatment; the dreaded surgery, chemotherapy, and the haunting images of looming death. However, none of these matters was her true concern, rather, the only affair that roused her fear was the daunting prospect of being denied the possibility of having a child. Hence, she decided to take the risk of postponing her second operation until she

found a doctor willing to harvest and freeze a number of eggs from her ovary. Her oncologists saw her decision as sheer insanity and an unwarranted endangerment of her life, since, such a procedure would take so much time that it would delay the course of her therapy and allow the tumor to spread further. In spite of that, her yearning to become a mother overpowered everything else in her mind; "I want to feel that this cancer could not deprive me of everything, and that I have ten frozen eggs waiting for me, until I find the right partner".

What mighty emotions those are, which impel someone to risk her own life for an offspring who has yet to come into existence; a being who is not even an embryo yet, but a prospective progeny, residing in a single ovum in her ovary.

And as I look around me, I am dumbfounded by the things I see and hear. I witness forms of behavior at odds with human nature itself, and even animalistic instinct for that matter; such attitudes like "I will throw my children onto their father, because sooner or later, they will grow up and forget about me, and they will leave me to him anyway, so why waste the prime of my youth caring for them".

Another mother would say "Those children will not benefit me in the future, and their only concerns will be about their friends, their outings, and later their wives. My career is my only asset and source of security, hence it takes priority over everything else".

I am well aware that life today is not only different from that of the past, but more difficult as well, however, I doubt very much whether it can begin to compare to the life of the mother badger, who decided to sacrifice her life to defend a cub which will most likely die within a few hours, and will not benefit her the least, even if he was to survive.

Pitiful Knowledge

Such a mystifying age we live in; one in which the pursuit of fruitful knowledge has been stripped of its essence, save the aspiration for a title; an aberrant attitude so prevalent that it has even plagued the zeal for new discoveries, wherein the participation in a given training course or scientific conference rests upon the acquisition of a certificate of attendance. Such an approach has destroyed the quest for knowledge for the sake of knowledge, or for the sake of public good, divine blessing, and heavenly reward. We have all become seekers of documents, certificates of attendance, and internationally recognized degrees, in the hope that such credentials might open for us new doors of ample livelihoods, prominent career prospects, and social recognition. Such has become the norm, that when our accreditations fail to attain for us those advantages, it becomes a source of bemusement that even though one possess this degree or that certificate, he is yet to ensure the work he aspires to, the social status he expects, or the salary he deserves. As if those pieces of paper have become, by themselves, testaments of our worthiness to live a prosperous life, and if, on the off chance we do not, we are quick to lament our fate and say in despair; Oh God, why me!?

And suffice it to say that if anyone of us was offered the choice between the pursuit of an accredited discipline and a more profound and useful knowledge, though unaccredited, we will surely choose the former, since such has become the normal trend in life nowadays.

Truly pitiful knowledge is, in its greater sense of the word; knowledge which is depicted by the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his saying "Whoever follows a path in pursuit of knowledge, God will facilitate for him a path to Paradise. The angels lower their wings in approval for the seeker of knowledge, and everyone in the heavens and on the earth prays for forgiveness for the seeker of knowledge, even the fish in the sea. The eminence of a scholar over a worshipper is like the eminence of the full moon above all other heavenly bodies. Scholars are the heirs of the Prophets, for the Prophets did not bequeath a Dinar or Dirham, rather they bequeathed knowledge, so whoever takes it has taken a great fortune".

It is pitiful indeed, that this prestigious knowledge shall be reduced to a piece of paper we call a certificate.

Judge Shuraih

Whoever exposes himself to the blessings of God shall earn them, and whoever prepares himself, through the means available to him, so that God may put him to good use shall be guided towards the good deeds he aspires to, without reckoning, and shall receive rewards far superior to the efforts he makes.

Shuraih was an ordinary man from Yemen, who was denied justice in his childhood, and to whom justice became the first and foremost meaning in his life.

He accepted Islam at the age of thirty, during the reign of Ali Bin Abi Talib over Yemen, among other Yemenites, and ever since his Islam, his life's ambition was to aid the implementation of justice in the land. He neither held an office, nor was he appointed to one, for he was no more than a simple, common man with a passionate quest for justice. Hence, he began to set himself, while still at home; learning, reading, and scrutinizing; in exploration of every material he could obtain that would be relevant to the rule of law. He envisioned himself in the seat of justice, and envisaged the convoluted narratives of the disputes he may encounter in that seat, as he postulated what he perceived to be a just ruling for each one of them.

No earlier than seventeen years later, when Shuraih had reached the age of forty seven, did he arrive at the day destined for him by God. On that particular day, the then Caliph; Omar Bin AlKhattab had a dispute with another Muslim, whereupon they decided to take the matter to a judge, who was chosen by Omar's litigator to be none other than Shuraih.

Thus, Shuraih was set to meet his fate and receive his godsend at the time of the great Islamic triumphs and expansion of the land. Having earned the deep admiration of Omar for his profound grasp of justice², he was appointed Chief Justice in Kufah, and he remained judge for a period of sixty years, spanning the rule of five consecutive Caliphs. He lived a long, healthy life till the age of one hundred and seven years, occupying the seat of justice with full mental faculties for twice the number of years he spent in preparation of himself, since the time his talent was but a dormant seed, hidden from the

² Incidentally, Judge Shuraih ruled against Omar in that incident. (The translator)

eyes of the public, though one which held roots deep in the soil, establishing the foundation upon which a fruiting tree was to soar seventeen years afterwards; a tree firm in the ground, with a trunk high in the sky, yielding its bounties by the will of its Lord for six long decades, and continuing to fruit long after Shuraih passed away, through the unrivaled legacy he founded in the fulfillment of equity and justice.

We have the sole obligation of grooming ourselves, and the rest is left to Him, Glory to His name, who affords the opportunities and empowers us to claim them.

Besides, even though extending our roots deep into the soil takes considerable time, and is largely overlooked by other people, it remains the basis for every great, everlasting feat.

On the other hand, the bustle we witness nowadays, made by the worthy and the unworthy, in pursuit of fame and glory, where everyone boasts about himself, speaks pretentiously, and has a dais to sound his opinion, and where everybody seeks celebrity and prominence, regardless of their lack of roots, depth, or meaningful essence, put in a word, is like the spume of the white-capped waves, swept away by the flooding tide, no matter how many people stand by to watch or cheer.

The Final Days of Radiotherapy

I drag my feet to yet another session of radiotherapy, just as I have done for seven successive weeks now, but it seems that with every new passing day, this dreaded morning journey is getting more arduous, as the bitter wintery winds howl all too often, and trudging through the snow, against the harsh wintery gusts proves much too nasty and strenuous. On top of that, the radiation I received over the past weeks has left its mark on my body, resulting in inflammation and soreness, and causing me much pain upon touch that even the slightest rub against my clothes is beginning to sting. Nevertheless, I must yet be subjected to more radiation that will target a part of my body which has already been scorched by the damaging rays. I haul myself to the hospital, while I try to reinvigorate my sense of purpose; well then, my intention is to seek cure as God commanded, so that I may fulfill my moral obligation to take every means possible bar none. I strive for a remedy to eliminate whatever part of the disease lingers on in my body, so that I may live, and mull over the purpose I seek in my life.

I intend to be, to my children, the best of mothers, to help them on their difficult life journey, and illuminate as much of their path as I can. I mean to become a light that shines for the sake of those around me, and a beacon of hope. I aspire to represent, to my vulnerable patients, the finest doctor, one who deeply understands their pain, seeing how I, myself, had my share of distress, and I will endeavor to venture unfathomed realms of psychiatry, for the good of the Arab world, which lags far behind in that regard, both in terms of the availability and quality of service, and public empathy and acceptance of mental illness.

Well then, now that I have refocused my intent, and my train has reached its destination, it is time for more radiotherapy. I am greeted by the nurse with a cheerful grin; "It's the last day, Yay".

Is it really. Is today the final day? I was immersed in a heartfelt joy. Finally, thanks to God.

I almost sprang out of excitement. I put on my gown in haste, and assumed my place at the waiting room, next to an elderly woman whom I had not come across before.

- Unable to contain my exhilaration, I took initiative and said "Today is my last day here".

- "Really? Congratulations. I'm in my third week out of seven now" she replied.

- "You will be fine, and the time will fly by" I said encouragingly.

- Then she asked me "Where do you receive your radiation dose?"

- "At the sight of the removed breast", I answered." And You?"

- "In my brain. I know that it's bad, isn't it? But I am certain that God will look after me and you as well".

- "Your brain, ah!" I remarked. "We're truly blessed". Then, after a few moments of silence I said on impulse "I have two children at home, a four year old and a four month old". And I smiled.

- She reciprocated with a smile, and rejoined "Don't worry, God will save you for them, so you can see them grow. I am sure of that. I'll pray for you, and you must pray for me".

Just at that moment, the nurse came in and called my name, so I smiled farewell and left her in the room.

After the session was over, the nurse handed me a rolled sheet of paper, and when I asked her what it was, she answered with a radiant laugh and said "Its your graduation sheet".

I opened the scroll to read it, and found it to be an actual certificate for graduating from radiotherapy, cosigned by all the nurses who supervised my treatment over the past weeks, wishing me full recovery.

Oh, what a delight this gift was, and what immense hope it emanated.

As I left the hospital, my heart was pounding with an earnest love for all of those with whom I share the gift of humanity, and breathe the same air.

Living with Half a Body

I resumed work at the addiction recovery hospital, tending to some of the most refractory substance abusers and offenders, who frittered away years of their lives with nothing to care for other than drugs. After suffering the loss of everything they once held dear; their families, friends, and financial wealth, they resorted to crime and recklessness, until the time came when they found themselves too old to pursue a life of false pleasures evinced in a sniff of this substance or an injection of that. As I interviewed my patients, one by one, I realized that this was neither their first visit here, nor is it likely to be their last, for they seem to be fixated at this state for years now. And with every new patient I encounter, the excruciating pain I feel suffocates my spirit, and almost denies me my breath.

I felt an urge to yell at each one of them "You do not realize, and probably never will, how cherished the blessing of life is; the life you are willing to squander away so foolishly".

But to be fair, no one truly appreciates the value of life except those who verged on losing it. I surmise this as I recollect the harsh memory of a bitter night, one that followed a day of radiotherapy. The site of radiation had suddenly inflamed and changed from red to brown, and then to black. That part of my body became so tense and swollen that even the slightest contact with my dress above it was an agony, and I succumbed to a sleepless night.

To be truthful, pain was not the worst part of that night, rather the gloomy thoughts which stormed through my head as I tried to apprehend my situation from a doctor's point of view. Maybe my muscles had withered from radiation, or perhaps I had contracted necrotizing fasciitis; a condition similar to gangrene, which calls for the prompt excision of the affected part, so as to save the rest of the body. The startling thought which came to mind during the dead of the night, was my wish that it had been my limb stricken with the disease and not my torso, which would have made an amputation feasible, and being drowsy from exhaustion, the nightmarish images of doctors excising half of my torso tormented me throughout that horrific, seemingly endless night.

Half asleep, I was harrowed by vivid hallucinations of a daring operation, only attempted by a few Russian surgeons, related to me at an earlier time by my husband, wherein a patient ridden with cancer in the lower abdomen undergoes a radical amputation of the whole lower half of his body as a last-ditch measure; a surgical procedure known as hemicorporectomy. And it was during those desperate moments of delirium and pain that I was prepared to consent to, if not to covet, such an extreme course of action, just to stay alive. But, to my dismay, my particular condition affected the upper half of my body, so how on earth would I have escaped this dilemma?

As morning came, I paid a visit to my radiologist to examine the swollen, darkened area of my body, and to my relief, she informed me that there was no cause for concern, as this was a rather common and transient consequence of my treatment.

And so, it turned out that my muscles hadn't withered, nor did I have gangrene or a lethal infection, at which point I re-envisioned my willingness to live without an arm, a leg, or half of my body if need be, which proved to me without doubt how precious the blessing of life is.

What Misery It Is, to Run Away from Oneself

A month passed by, at the addiction recovery hospital, and what a month it was. I came across aspects of life I had not seen before, and encountered types of people I had not met before. My dear patients have all come to this place all too often, and some of whom have become regulars over the span of two decades. All of them, save a few, have lost the acceptance of their families entirely; shunned by their closest kin, while some have even been issued restraining orders. The majority of them live on the street and take refuge in local hospitals when the weather becomes too bitter to bear; feigning suicidal thoughts to escape the harshness of the cold, or stay at a friend's house; sleeping on the sofa, until they outstay their welcome. All too many of them have been in prison, for crimes as minor as drug possession, to armed robbery, property damage, and assaults on police officers. Almost all of them were either battered or sexually abused during childhood, only to grow into assailants and rapists themselves. As for the women, virtually all have fallen victim to multiple rapes, and all but a few pursue a life of prostitution to provide for the only two indispensable elements in their lives; drugs and scarce food.

Our task, as a medical team, can be summed up in assisting them to overcome their substance abuse. Within three to four days of their admittance, we begin by providing them with a safe alternative to the addictive drug they are used to administer outside hospital, while gradually tapering their dosage to help them rid their bodies of their dependence with the least possible withdrawal symptoms. Meanwhile, we try to deal with any concomitant mental issues that may coincide with their addiction, such as anxiety or depression. Afterwards, a team of social counsellors works to transfer them to specialized rehabilitation programs; available with varying degrees of effectiveness, and depending on the level of progress a patient displays within such programs, he may subsequently be moved to a halfway house, paid for in part or in full by the state, with the stipulation that no drug or alcohol whatsoever shall enter the residence.

And despite how pleasing those provided services may appear to the reader, and how sufficient they seem for an addict to begin a new life, the

truth of the matter remains that the providers of these services see utter failure as the patient is discharged from hospital fully intent on renouncing addiction, only to stumble at first sign of pressure during the rehabilitation program, either by entering into a fight, attacking someone, stealing somebody's prescribed medication, or just by becoming too bored with his stay, in which case only one consequence awaits him; returning to the street, injecting heroin, or inhaling cocaine, whereupon he arrives back at the same or a different hospital a week or two later, when a passer-by finds him unconscious from an overdose or exhausted from cold or hunger, and brings him back to enjoy a few nights of warm comfort and some hot meals.

As I ran the question in my head hundreds of times, as to the cause of this shocking failure, I found the answer more evident the more time I spent talking to my patients and dealing with them. How pitiful those people are, when they have spent years upon years unable to experience conscious solitude, and unable to bring themselves to contemplate their own selves or consider their own thoughts. They say it loud and clear, that their only purpose in life is "to get high"; to live under the elation of this drug or that, if not for the sake of pleasure itself, then just to escape being aware of their own thoughts and mulling over their own lives, because to them, their lives seem fixated in time; with neither a sense of the past nor the future, for their past is ridden with images of abuse, rape, and agonizing memories, whereas the future seems bland, with nothing to look forward to. Hence, being sober without a drug, even if only a prescription sedative, puts them face to face with the very reality they dread; their own self, one from which they find no escape, other than putting an end to their own lives.

I listen to such words from a patient, and from countless others, and I find myself overtaken with sympathy and understanding of their dilemma; an empathy that extends even to the fierce criminals among them; the abusers and rapists.

As I witness this wretched addiction at its worst, I ride the train every day, only to see another face to this dependency, where everyone is hooked to their smart gadgets, listening to music, as their fingertips unceasingly caress their screens to summon the nothingness which fills the vast realms of social media, while the culprit is one and the same; the fact that human beings cannot bear to face their own existence. People have grown weary of the gaping desolateness inside; anxiously chasing the nearest form of

addiction at hand, to distract their minds from thinking and their hearts from feeling. And so, our dependencies vary, from the heroin shot, through explicit websites, to the so called platforms of social media, which are, in actuality, neither social nor are they media of communication.

Everyone is running, and everybody is eluding, but what a dreadful pity it is, to evade none other than one's own self.

After Therapy is Over

Most people believe that all the problems of a cancer patient end by the time his treatment is concluded, as if by some magic wand every malignant cell in his body had been annihilated. And if tests show no signs of the disease, then they conclude that the matter must be over, and the illness is but ancient history and a faint memory.

Unfortunately, actual reality is not that simple, because neither our scientific knowledge, nor our mental conceptualization favor such a notion of abrupt conclusion.

From a pure scientific perspective, medicine is far more lacking than many of us would like to think. For instance, there is not one test that can claim the absence of cancer cells from the body, and the less said the better on our inability to disprove the spread of a given cancer, or predict the course of behavior of its rapidly growing cells. In the end, matters are solely in the Hand of a Mighty, Powerful Lord. As for its psychological implications, cancer is a disease that will never cease to exist in the mind of the patient, and even long after treatment, concerns will linger about its possible recurrence, spread, or metastasis, which leaves a thread of apprehension, tethering the patient to his Lord, in hope and reliance, knowing that no one else whatsoever can help him or truly appreciate the magnitude of His reality.

Every night I have a set date with the looming thoughts of illness; whether the headache I experienced earlier that day was a sign of relapse or not, and as I recall in my mind the symptoms of brain metastasis, it dawns on me that my ache which started at night is inconsistent with that of a tumor, since the latter begins in the morning, and when I remember the nausea I had but a week ago, I remind myself that it was transient, hence it too does not coincide with that of a tumor. I would think of the stomach ache which troubled me, whether it was a sign of liver metastasis, then I comfort myself with the fact that my recent liver function test was normal. Then again, what if my abdominal pain was an ovary cancer, a not so uncommon concurrence with breast cancer? And so I dwell upon my thoughts for minutes each night, before I remember to allay my fears and find solace in the presence of my

Lord, as I mumble in surrender "I accept God as my Lord, and accept His providence as my fate".

Then, when I wake up the next morning, my worries are long forgotten, and I find myself occupied with work, my children, and the rush of life, that is until the fall of night, when my worries creep up on me again, and I ask myself whether I should relay such concerns to my doctor so that she may conduct further investigations or not. The decision to consider one's apprehensions true threats or dismiss them and seek refuge in God's protection from ill thoughts is but one example of the day to day uncertainty suffered by a cancer patient, lest he/she rouses the concerns of those around him needlessly.

We Shall All Be Fine

I write as I join a group of cancer patients in the waiting room of a hospital, awaiting our turns to receive our maintenance doses of chemotherapy, which, in my case, will last for a whole year. I do not usually stand in line with other people, rather I immediately access the private chemotherapy room, but today I am due for a lesson, apparently.

Only a few days had passed since I resumed my work, and it seems that the bloated self-importance of doctors had caught up with me.

Maybe I had re-contracted the sense of immunity or impunity which besets doctors; convincing themselves that diseases always affect other people, and not them.

As I sit among my fellow patients, some of whom wear masks, others need oxygen, and some have discolored faces and protruding eyes, I thank God that I look much better than some of them do, and I feel it somewhat unsettling that I come wearing a red garment and a colorful head cover, adorned with roses.

Yet, perhaps my colors will convey to them a sense of hope; that you shall all be fine, just as I feel fine; that those days shall quickly pass by, and that it shall all end well.

Your Parents Are Too Old

He is told "Both of your parents are old, and your father is nearing the end of his days, so how can you travel and leave them when they are so in need of you now".

"I cannot stay", he replies, "and my father wants what is best for me. Besides, my friend went and came back with a degree, assumed his career, and became the envy of many, whereas I have not moved one step forward. I want to progress in order to catch up with my friends, and not feel, in any way, lesser than them".

What a pitiful man, eluded by a concept as ancient as humanity itself; that of constraining oneself within the imaginary confines of his own mind, and restricting the vast depths of life within those confines. Abu Jahl³ can be perceived as an example of this concept. For, when the Prophet came with a fresh, global message, all he could think of were the old confines of his imagination; the restrictive comparisons he held dear, saying "The sons of Abd Munaf⁴ and we are in a horse race; they fed (the pilgrims), and so did we, and they gave them drinks, and so did we. So, if they conjure up a prophet, how will we ever compete. By God, we shall never believe in his prophecy".

That pathetic man could not see beyond the narrow limits of his own mind. If he had just set aside his personal analogies for a moment, he would have attained the honor of this life and the next, and he would have been immortalized in the narratives of history, being a companion who sided with the divine message, and who could have possibly become a Muslim ruler later on. Yet, he failed to see any of this, because the boundaries of analogies to which he committed himself blinded his sight, cramped him within, and denied him an abundance of virtue.

Oh, how many an ample reward the borders of comparisons refuse us, and how many a snare it leads us into; "somebody received such and such and I didn't", causing him tension and much debt, so that he may equal that person in appearance, while he misses on plentiful opportunities of his own,

³ Abu Jahl was a tribal leader and fierce enemy to Prophet Muhammad PBUH. (The translator)

⁴ The sons of Abd Munaf were the Prophet's clan. (The translator)

blinded by his unrelenting anxiety as he squanders away his chance to find pleasure in life and an imminent joy which would have landed at his feet, if only he had not lived his days hampered within the limitations of his mind. As early as childhood, we begin to compare ourselves to our peers and competitors in terms of accomplishments and possessions; "This person has such a toy, that individual achieved such a mark, he bought such a gadget or car, she came back with such a degree, and someone was granted this position or received that salary".

Yet, all too often, such comparisons deny us much happiness and withhold from us much good, not to mention how much of life's riches and wealth they blind our eyes from seeing; which is by far greater than any illusionary confines into which we cramp ourselves, either willfully, or on account of an establishment, a job position, or a particular social standing. Thus, our fellow, who decided to leave his parents at their declining years, and entered the arena with his friends who preceded him and brought back their trophy certificates, was eluded by the fact that some things in life cannot be compensated, and that the passing of one of his parents during his absence, when their need of him is at its greatest, will leave a gaping wound in his heart, which may never heal, not for a dozen degrees. He fails to consider that such success is solely in God's hand, and that true achievements in life are far more extensive than just an academic degree, for many is the degree which bestowed upon its bearer no more than the pleasure of hanging on the wall inside a frame, with no benefit to show for, whereas many is the successful, the achiever, the prestigious job holder, and the millionaire who lacked any academic certificate or degree.

Our fellow could see none of those things, because his eyes were set on one thing alone; his former friend who surpassed him, and whose pursuit had become the purpose of his life, therefore, he sees nothing but the walls of his imaginary confinement.

We all possess different speeds of maturity, and varying modes of fruition, hence, your race against somebody else, even though he may differ from you entirely, might be unfair to your own potentials, which are overlooked by your incessant focus on the achievements of that other person and your relentless attempts at mimicking them.

Have you not reflected upon the trees? Have you not seen that even though two seeds are confined to the same soil, one of them may flourish in a

matter of weeks, and thrive atop the ground for all people to see, while the other may dally beneath the surface; extending roots that are unseen, and just as people begin to doubt whether it will ever prosper, it erupts from the ground, and maintains its solid growth. And as the days pass by, and the wind howls, the feeble, rootless stalk is swept away, while the steady, rooted stem; that which could not be any less mindful of the opinion people held of its slow pace or delayed blossoms, holds steadfast against the blowing gusts, living on, year after year; {Its root is firm, and its branches are in the sky. It yields its fruits every season by the will of its Lord}. Bury your existence underneath the pretense of inertia, for that which flourishes without being concealed underground, will not bear fruit.

With My Son in the Elevator

A lady rode up the elevator, alongside me and my four year old son, and she asked him to press the button of the floor she wanted, and he did. She thanked him warmly and praised his cleverness, while he kept his silence, that is until the elevator door opened on her floor, and just as she was stepping out, he decided to chat.

"Oh, do you know, today is my birthday", he said, "and my teacher, Ms Lindsay threw me a party, and I received gifts", and as he fervently recounted the thrilling details of his birthday party, she stood there politely, holding the elevator door with her hand. And only when he had finished his little speech did she wish him a happy birthday and go on her way.

I relived that brief incident in my head and tried to imagine what it would have been like if it had happened in an Arab country, would such a woman take the time to listen attentively to my son's story, so as not to embarrass him, and would she have respected him as a little human being.

As I contemplated such an imaginary encounter, I was almost certain that no one would have taken the time to entertain the prattle of a child. And as I further mulled over the experience, I realized that a child in our societies would not initiate a conversation with such ease and confidence with a total stranger. Because, in our societies, children are taught that their silence is a virtue and their talk is a nuisance. I recall from my childhood years that I was not permitted to speak, outside the circle of my immediate family and friends, and whenever my uncles and aunts would visit, only the men had the privilege to talk, while the women were expected to keep silent, and if it was a gathering of women only, then they surely had no tolerance for the nonsense of small children, and as they tried to talk, they were given no attention at all, until they outstay their welcome and are banished to another room accompanied by their older siblings. It was not something we learnt as children; that we had the right to be respected, or to have an opinion and voice it, and to make matters worse, school only reinforced this custom, as the ideal student was considered the one who remained silent, did not discuss or debate, and did not let his voice be heard.

Where does this model stand, with regard to the respect human beings are given in America, where a busy woman who cannot wait to return to her own child from a long day at work, feels too embarrassed to interrupt a babbling child she barely knows, as he eagerly elaborates on the details of his birthday party.

How Much Do We Change

When I consider how my personality has changed over the years, I cannot but marvel at the human ability to adapt. Since early childhood, I possessed such an unsettled disposition that I was too hungry for perfection and too restive not to attain it. For me, time was perfected to the minute with a ruler, pencil, and paper, then, as I acquired knowledge of religion, I found myself becoming only more zealous, not to mention the impression my mother left on me, who treasured time and achievement, to say the least.

Everyday, I had a new to-do list, that only expanded and never shrank as the days went by. During my summer holidays, that checklist was beyond the bounds of possibility for a human being to achieve in a single day, rather, a week would have barely sufficed, yet, my failure to cross every item on that agenda succumbed me to an agonizing guilt, which accompanied me like an inseparable alter ego.

The schedule I kept and to which I confined my daily scheme consisted of a variety of tasks, at the helm of which were reading books, listening to talks, and undertaking voluntary activities. Then I became more flexible, as I included in visiting relatives and helping with daily chores, yet my sense of guilt kept up with me regardless, since the plans I devised were always wildly optimistic for the time at hand, but that was the way I felt things should be, because to me, writing down a shorter list was an act of sheer indolence and lack of ambition, and thus I lived. I even remember on the day of Eid, when we used to celebrate together, which we seldom did on ordinary days, I would take with me a book or two, though I never found the time to open them, just to put my conscience at ease. On top of that, everything I did had to have a specific aim, so if I were to visit my friend, I would ask myself beforehand, what is the goal of this visit, and I would answer; to study with each other, to plan a voluntary activity, or to praise God together, hence, the duration of each visit would be planned accordingly.

I do not recall making a visit only for the sake of visiting someone, or walking around just for fun, and that was how things always were, until I was engaged to Anas. At the beginning, my decision to give consent was not an easy one to make, and that is how my "goal" during the engagement became

to know him better, so I can reach a more informed decision. I could not allow myself to be overcome by a mere coincidence, and prior to his every visit, I would prepare a set of well thought out questions that I liked to ask, and monitor his answers carefully. Then, when he leaves, I would go to my room, and write down his strong suits and flaws, since I was always recording his every move and gesture in my mind.

And woe to him, the day he arrives late, for this means only one thing; a lacking sense of responsibility. As for him coming in his work clothes, well, that only means that he does not care much for his appearance in front of me, which is just disrespectful, and so on. I could not permit myself to fall in love, because unplanned love is "irrational".

Until the day came when Anas visited unannounced. I was floundered as to what to do with the time, or what to say to him, for I have not planned nor prepared, and I had not decided in advance the matters we were supposed to discuss. However, I was compelled to see him and was forced to speak with him on spontaneous, unrehearsed issues for the first time during our engagement. We talked on ordinary matters, we laughed, and we joked, and I felt during the course of that visit that he was a good friend and an easy person, and I felt that I could be open with him without the need to rehearse. This particular call brought us closer and made me more comfortable in his presence. Later on, and as I was preparing for our honeymoon trip, I packed everything I thought I would need to achieve the "goal" of the trip; taking no less than eight CDs with me, even though we would not likely listen to any of them, and a book on marital life, while refraining from taking other educational materials, so as not to bore him to death.

When we set out on our trip, I discovered that I had little use for the things I prepared and planned, and the simple stroll on the streets of Istanbul or Antalya was an immense joy by itself. I found out that I was in the company of someone who was uncomplicated, open, and natural. And as the days went, I learnt many new things and rid myself of many complexities. I no longer felt the urge to look at my watch five times to ensure that I had time to do whatever task came next on my list, rather, I went on days on end without consulting my watch or even wearing it. I was finally able to go out without deciding were I wanted to go beforehand. Afterwards, I became capable of perceiving the time I spend playing with my children as a time of accomplishment, even though it bore no "worth" in terms of my progression in

knowledge. And, despite the fact that breaking away from the constraints of old habits which are passed down by one's genes and reinforced by one's upbringing is by no means a small feat, I am still making changes to date.

How to Withstand Pain

At the present time, I feel pain in my bones from my metastasizing tumor. In spite of still being able to walk on my feet, every step carries with it a fear of losing my footing and breaking a bone somewhere in my body. As I attempt to distract myself by reading on the life of the Prophet and his companions, I find ample comfort in the narrations I come across. The simplicity with which the companions dealt with life is plainly astonishing. One companion would say "Nothing stands between me and Paradise other than my enemy", as he throws away the dates in his hands and charges into battle, and another would say "I find the scent of Paradise from the mountain of Uhud", and rushes to his final fight. In another incident, when one of the combatants loses his eye to an arrow, he hurries back to warn his fellow soldiers, covers his eye with a cloth, and goes back to fight, without so much as a moment of grief over the loss of his beloved eye for the rest of his life. Where is his post traumatic stress disorder, or his fear of returning to the battlefield lest his horrific memories recur? Nowhere. He simply patched his head and went back.

As for the single story which I found very hard to believe, had it not been documented in the history books, is that concerning a companion during the battle of Qadissyah, whose stomach was slashed with a sword, whereupon he asked his brothers to help him up, and pressed his wound with one hand, as he held his sword with the other.

From The Confines of the Body to the Vast Realms of the Spirit

This stage of my illness requires so much certainty in faith to overcome, that it has truly tested mine to the extreme, and only God knows how fearful I am of failing. As I feel pain and decide to recite the Prophet's supplication "Lord of the people, eliminate my harm", I feel reluctant for fear that it would be in vain. Yes indeed, God is most Capable; however, I did ask Him before, with all my heart, to rid my body of every last malignant cell. When I think, perhaps, that it might be better not to ask for cure, I suddenly remember that this second phase of my illness, despite being seemingly too hard to bear, and despite living almost devoid of hope and insight, or lacking the options or space to maneuver, I am still discovering fresh meanings to the prayer "Oh Savior, deliver me from harm", and I feel at the absolute edge of utter breakdown and disintegration, were it not for the Mighty Hand of God, for He has created a miracle within my heart, as He swept away my love for this world, and brought the fondness for the Hereafter ever closer to my soul. I have come to envision myself with awe, joining the gathering of the virtuous and the righteous, across the face of time and space, where I break the bonds of this earthly body, and roam free without confines.

Nothing was dearer to my heart, than my academic work; the scholarship and psychiatry, but for the first time in my life, I find myself unwilling to sacrifice my last breath for its sake, and as I raise my hands in supplication, those words swarm my head; "Oh God, I surrender my desires, so do with me as You Will".

God's ways are as diverse as the breaths of all beings, which is perhaps why this particular path was not meant to be, even though my unwavering rational belief is that a career in psychiatry would have been tailored to my personality; a conviction expressed multiple times by my professors, colleagues, and patients alike, however, it seems that this was not destined to be my door to Paradise. Maybe God had chosen for me a path that is shorter, more beneficial to His servants, and more sincere to my heart, or perhaps still, that was not the time for any such thing after all, and that God intended to abolish every earthly desire lingering in my heart, to raise upon its ruins a

structure far grander, founded upon piety from God and His satisfaction, instead of that which was heaped up at the edge of a collapsing ridge.

I consider the ousting of this world from the depths of my heart an unrivaled feat, one which I dare not claim to have done by myself, rather by the concealed Hand of God, through the driving forces of trials, the nearness of death, and the constraints of life, and perhaps, this was the moral of these events all along, and another significance too, that my heart shall never be void of love for people, kindness to them, compassion for their troubles, prayer for their needs, and true concern for their burdens, even as their tribulations may not begin to compare to mine, and I should never belittle the adversity of anyone, regardless, even if they were apparently as minor as an argument with a coworker or a quarrel with the in-laws, because after all, it is the size of the grievance in the heart that counts and not the importance of the matter.

And I am confident beyond doubt, that if I exhibit the fortitude to vacate my own personal pain, and embrace the suffering of others, which is a task easier said than done, given the intensity of my own agony that all too often confines me to bed, then I will surely find solace outside my personal affliction, the stream of life shall gush into my heart, and my spirit would soar from joy and exhilaration.

A Prayer Shall Be Answered in Due Course

Sitting alongside a dear friend of mine whom I have not seen for years, engaged in conversation, she tells me of her life and her relationship with her mother; from the outings they take together, and the recipes they jointly prepare, to the opinions they share on different matters in life. As she was joyfully recounting her day to day activities, I was increasingly overcome with surprise, since her relationship with her mother had been soured for years, through endless fights and quarrels, and what made matters worse, was her incessant feeling of guilt that God would not accept any of her good deeds or aid her on her life's pursuits, owing to her ingratitude, and that He would not endow her with children unless they are as insolent to her as she seems to her mother. She would stay up the nights in supplication, asking God to mend the rift between her and her mother, until one day she called me to say that she had been praying earnestly, and that she was certain that God had heard her pleas, since she felt a strange sense of comfort washing over her heart that night. However, no later than the next morning did she experience one of the worst fights in her life, which left her perplexed as to the fate of her appeals. I recalled that incident in my mind as she was talking, and I couldn't help but bring it up; "Do you mind if I ask you something" I said, "I noticed from your speech a remarkable improvement in your relationship with your mother, so how did that happen?", and she said "Honestly, I don't know. I realized that a change was coming about gradually, but I couldn't understand how. Taking everything into consideration, it is logically impossible for this to happen, owing to our entirely different personalities which disagree on almost everything, yet here we are, and I am as dumbfounded by this as you are".

"As for me, I am not so astounded", I replied, "because I know exactly what happened. It is your prayer which was certainly heard and not dismissed. Would you have thought that your pleas to God could have gone astray? Would you have imagined that the tears you shed or the wishes you confided in God could have been without merit? This is the miracle of praying, and that is the kind of patience God commanded of us, if the answer to our prayers seems to dally. The problem we face is that God's reply to our invocations does not come in the manner of a grand ceremony after the

curtains are raised and the applause roars, rather, it comes in a subtle way, one step at a time, like a shower of rain each day, or a thin trickle, one drop at a time. Change may take such small steps, that it may evade our attention. However, when the canvas is finished, and all is set, the devil comes in disguise, to erase from our minds the memory of our prayers, and the remembrance of how things initially were; claiming that what happened was by mere coincidence, or worse, on account of our own merit and skill. He may invoke us to look at our other troubles, those which have not been resolved yet, to belittle the grace we have received, and swerve us away from the moment of gratitude towards God, when we want to say "Thank You God, for You alone made this change happen. It is You who answered my prayer, even if Your reply came later than I had desired".

Such is the epitome of our relationship with God, and the summary of the trial of life; to be rightly thankful and show due gratitude. And this is why the devil set his mind to corruption of this particular quality when he said {By Your majesty, I will seduce them all}(H.Quran: 38/82), and said {Then I will come at them from before them, and from behind them, and from their right, and from their left; and you will not find most of them appreciative}(H.Quran: 7/17).

Never Cease to Ask God, Regardless

Naturally, when anyone is tested with an affliction or adversity he hurtles towards God in prayer, since we have none other. But, as we ask of Him, we unconsciously imagine that His answer will assume a rather dramatic path, as if by some magic, I will open my eyes tomorrow, and find that my calamity is over, just like that, in one swift step. While acknowledging without a hair of hesitation that God is most Capable and defeated by nothing, matters do not usually take such abrupt turns. Prayer is by itself a form of trial by God to His servants; a test of patience, confidence, and certainty in faith, in a way that you may plea to Him one day, and face a more distressful crisis the next, until such a time may come that if you become weary and despondent, you forsake appealing to Him and consider your supplication futile, whereas, if you are a person of resolve and certitude, you sustain your prayers.

Then, just as you overcome that hurdle and maintain your invocation, it begins to shower, drop by drop, such that you may overlook the association between your entreaty and the falling rain, or the fact that the person who came to your aid seemingly from nowhere was actually sent by God. Afterwards, when the course of events shifts and matters settle, we abruptly cease to petition.

This is how the cunning devil enacts his vicious ploy; striving to execute his threat {and you will not find most of them appreciative}(H.Quran:7/17). He erases the memory of your prayers, and God's answer to them, and instead, he diverts your attention to the other troubles you face, so that you may never find comfort in your nearness to God, or in knowing that this nearness is unsurpassable by any other.

I recall the time when I was sent home from America, as per my doctor's requests, to put the affairs of my children in order before I depart. I was very sick then. I had excruciating pain days on end, and my mind was preoccupied with my pain medication, not to mention my severe anemia, my low platelet count and impending bleeding episodes, or my suppressed immunity and fear of infections.

It was a period in my life in which I entreated a great deal, and little by little, my pain subsided and I no longer needed any pain killers. I even

returned to chemotherapy, to which the disease began to respond gradually. However, was I truly thankful at the time? To be honest, no I was not. Because my agony abated at such a slow pace, that I did not take notice of the change, until a friend of mine once asked me about the type of drugs I was taking, and I said that I was not taking any, and only then did I realize to show gratitude for God, who alleviated my suffering.

Nevertheless, the chemotherapy sessions remained a burden on my heart, as well as my constant need for blood transfusions every time I went there, my diminished platelet count, and the incessant lethargy I had. Those traces of my illness engrossed me so, that I failed to appreciate the many blessings with which God endowed me, until I deteriorated again, the aching torment recurred, and my response to treatment not only halted, but the tumor spread and ruined other parts of my body. And as I remember the vendetta of Satan in which he promised; {and you will not find most of them appreciative}(H. Quran: 7/7), I become aware that it is this quality in which we are truly tested, and to which we must direct our efforts.

After Widespread Metastasis, I Resume Work

Today is my first day at work in the mental health clinic in Saudi Arabia, now that my disease has overtaken my body. It was truly a challenge, and a remarkable turn of events.

I find it very perturbing that I must wear the white coat again, and my only desire is to go to work without it. I feel as if putting on that particular garment is somehow deceitful; given how I, of all people, to whom death has been looming for months, should be dressed in the uniform of healers; as if I had any power or health left in me. As I clothe myself with that distinct outfit, I cannot help but think that I was cloaking myself with the false pride of doctors and their unfounded sense of power to bring about cure. And after draping myself with it, a discrete thought overwhelmed me every time I encountered someone on the way; I am not whom I seem, so do not be misguided by my appearance, and do not be deluded by my guise.

My Body and My Spirit

When I think of my poor body, which has endured so much, from the burden of illness, surgery, and anticancer drugs, to the stress of labour, radiation, and widespread metastasis, not to mention, the anemia, the low platelet count, and suppressed immunity, I cannot help but wonder if it can ever manage to rebuild itself, because, is it even conceivable that I can retain the health of a woman in her third decade. But soon afterwards, a strange sense of detachment from my physical form swamps me, since this body is but a mount, and even though I may feel physically unwell, my inner wellness is unsurpassed. Then again, what more can I ask of my body than to take me ashore, for it is no more than a vessel for my spirit to ride, as we cross the churning waters of the river of life. If so, what would it ever matter, had the keel been scored, nicked or its coat abraded, because I can never carry it with me to the other side, rather, I must then abandon ship, and allow my spirit to traverse alone to shore, for it is merely a mount, and I needn't worry.

Your Love and Prayers Brought Me Immense Joy

My certitude waxes and wanes, but I am currently at my best. It has been a while now, since my disease spread to my marrow; an outcome which troubled me, and I felt as if all doors were shut in my face, as I walk across a dark corridor that only narrows more with each passing day, until it closes dead on me. And as I saw no possible evasion of my fate, I succumbed to despondency.

However, it was by sheer Will of God, that a group of my friends decided to surprise me on my birthday with a multitude of prayers written on helium balloons, which we set free to soar in the sky; to deliver each plea closer to the Mighty Lord. Those written words carried meanings of immense positivity; "I had always perceived you as a lantern that carries His Light, shining upon all others", or "I believe that you guide people to His door, through the path of psychiatry". As I listened to those phrases, wishes, and prayers, I stood in wonderment, because I never regarded myself as such, nor will I likely ever become so, yet, the delight which they imparted to my spirits was undeniable. Then, God's greater blessing was conferred on me, when I regained the capacity to go to the clinic; the sanctuary where I can see my patients, and what a feeling of elation it was, as if my spirit, which had once departed me, returned to my body. My heart pounded with excitement, yearning, and passion with every new patient I saw. Oh, how I cherish psychiatry, and how I relish listening to a person describing his hallucinations, as I marvel at the miraculous creation, that is the human mind, and how it can reel with the slightest of upsets to its chemistry. Oh, how captivating it is for me, to sit with a patient, probing the source of agony inside his inner self, and descending to the depths of his essence, trying to unveil its truth and identify its nature.

What magnificent fortune a psychiatrist possesses, and how grave his responsibility as well. His patients allow him into the deepest secrets of their psyches, as he treads with them along the dark, intricate passageways of their inner selves, carrying nothing on their trek, but the lantern of his knowledge and experience to illuminate within them the unseen, so that they may discern what they could not before.

After my shift at the clinic was over, I had a compelling desire to embrace everything around me from exhilaration, and I felt an overwhelming wish to live. I beseeched Him; "Oh Lord, I want to give and to serve. I have much to afford, and I am sure that none of it was given to me purposelessly by You. I am certain that I was beset with this illness, with all its weight, fear, and torment, so that I may become more appreciative of the fear, torment, and dejection felt by other people, and so that my empathy and cognizance may grow more profound. Oh Lord, I perceive Your Wisdom, and my reliance is upon You alone, for even if doctors lose heart, by Your Mighty Power, I can defeat this wretched illness, and leave it trailing behind, so that I may set forth anew, to give Your servants some of what You bestowed upon me. Oh Lord, You are my strength, and You are my faculty; {It was not you who killed them, but it was God who killed them. And it was not you who launched when you launched, but it was God who launched}(H. Quran: 8/17).

**Glimpses of Noor's
Life and ordeal
Dr. Mohammed Albar (Noor's father)**

Noor was my youngest child, following three sisters, all of whom learnt the Quran by heart, thanks to God, and one brother, Ali, who also memorizes several parts as well. They all excelled in their studies, and strive to abide by their religion and its teachings.

With God's Grace, since her early childhood, Noor always displayed inordinate reason, and I recall three incidents from those times past, when she was only five, to illustrate my point.

In the first incident, we were gathered on the terrace, when rain started to fall. My older sister was with us at the time and she chanted the verses:

Pour pour Milk milk
Alaidarous Entered Aden

She was referring to a then popular folk tale, that when Imam Abu Bakr Al Aidarous entered Aden in the year 889 Hijri, the sky rained milk, denoting the immense joy of Adenese people in welcoming such a renowned scholar and gracious man.

Just then Noor said to her aunt; "milk, milk!"

And her aunt replied; "Yes, it was a sign of reverence. Ask your father".

So she looked at me in astonishment, and I said "What do you think?".

She thought for a moment, and answered "it's a myth", so I laughed and embraced her.

A second event happened at school, when her teacher asked each pupil in her class to name parts of their bodies which were created in pairs. They started to mention the eyes, the ears, the arms, the legs, the lips, and when it was Noor's turn, she named the heart. The teacher immediately said "Noor, the heart is only one", but, to her surprise, Noor replied "No miss, because the heart has two chambers; a right ventricle and a left ventricle". "Who taught you that, it must have been your father", her teacher responded, and she said "No, I heard it from my older sisters, that's how I learnt it".

On yet another occasion, I was driving, and Noor was sitting in the backseat, and just as I was crossing a yellow traffic light without stopping, it turned red, which immediately prompted Noor to say "Father, you crossed a red light!!", and she was right, because it had become red the instant I was passing by, and so I said to her "You are an excellent traffic officer".

Once Noor had reached the latter years of primary school, she had already perused all the books written by Ahmad Bakatheer, and by her middle school years she had read them more than once, especially "The Epic of Omar", at which point she moved on to devour the international literary works of Chekhov and Dostoyevsky, among others, along with the works of Mustafa Mahmoud, Khalid Muhammad Khalid, and Amr Khalid. She evidently took after her father, mother, and older sisters, who were all ardent readers, if not surpassed them too.

Her mother and I were determined not to employ private tutors, and had to therefore suffice with public schools, particularly during the earlier stages of their education, and with God's Grace, all of our children maintained academic excellence throughout their studies.

Once they reached college, we were keen that they choose their own path, after affording them the counseling they needed, and never did we favor our only son over his sisters, though he tried to impose his will over them once in a while, were it not for the firm stance his mother and I maintained on that issue.

Their college years were no exception, and they all attained distinction, as three of the girls were named Model Students, including Noor, who was the first in her class, thanks to God, whose gracious gifts are beyond count or enumeration, and, we ask of Him to endow us with the blessing of gratitude and praise.

Another of God's blessings was the fact that all of our children were brought up on sincerity, honesty, love of God, and fear of Him; a feat owed in no small measure to the efforts of a group of our Syrian sisters, who taught them the Quran and the life of the Prophet, and led them by example, and for whom we pray that God reward them the best of rewards.

After she married her college classmate, they went on a scholarship to Canada, which she later relinquished, owing to the delicate state of her first pregnancy, whereupon they earned another grant to study in the United States, despite the multiple, stringent requirements they were required to

meet before enrolling in their higher studies. And it was at this stage in her life that she experienced her second pregnancy and developed her cancer; the story so vividly and gracefully recounted by Noor herself.

When she told us of her illness, I remember talking to her and asking her about her intentions regarding the pregnancy, considering how it may become jeopardized by chemotherapy, and she replied that she was reading on new medications which are deemed safe. And since I myself had read articles on that intricate matter, and had encountered a similar incident at the International Medical Center, wherein the oncologist favored termination, contrary to the obstetrician, who preferred that the pregnancy go to term in accordance with the mother's wishes, and after much deliberation, I was compelled to side with the obstetrician on that particular case, even though the gestation was prior to the one hundred and twenty day mark, set by the Prophetic saying, as narrated by the two authors, Al-Bukhari and Muslim, by route of the companion Ibn Masoud, which is accepted by Muslim scholars to be a determinant of the time at which the spirit is breathed into a human being.

Incidentally, a number of Islamic rulings clearly permit the termination of a pregnancy even after it had passed the one hundred and twenty day stage, if there was no other means to save the life of the mother, except by way of termination, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy; a verdict which I conveyed to her extensively.

I finally said to her; "Noor, pray to God for guidance". Afterwards, when I asked her what her decision was, she told me that she was inclined towards continuing with her pregnancy, and she even mentioned that upon opening the Quran, the single verse that immediately caught her eye was {Do you intend to kill me, as you killed someone yesterday?}.

So, I responded without hesitation and said "Then it is settled, rely upon God, and you shall find in Him deliverance and rescue".

And thus, Maryam came to be; sound and well by the Grace of God, and a delight for us all, together with her brother, Ahmad.

This book, which I present before you, is one to which Noor once confided her thoughts and conceptions following an ordeal with cancer, a cancer which was not only at an advanced stage and rapidly progressing, but coincided with her pregnancy as well. Yet, Noor was able, through sheer faith, to endow us all with an invaluable lesson in belief and certitude, and to

experience the transcendence of her spirit as she yearned to meet God, and the Prophet PBUH together with his companions. As she departed this world, she felt utterly immersed in the Grace of God and His love, and she was confident that she was merely exiting the life of hardship to a home of immense happiness and delight, in an assembly of virtue, in the presence of an Omnipotent King.

When the malignancy spread, even after the surgical intervention, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, her Physicians advised her to go back home.

Our Consultant Oncologist Professor Ezzeldin Ibrahim referred her to the National Guard hospital that provided excellent oncology service to all Saudi citizens. Dr. Mutaib Al Fehaidi, a Consultant in Oncology treatment of Breast Cancer accepted her and was very kind to offer her fast track when she attends, but she refused to have any advantage despite the widespread metastasis of the tumor and the severe pains that she was suffering, and the need for blood transfusion in most sessions, which usually take the whole day.

Nevertheless she kept her high spirits and even went to see her Psychiatric patients in King Abdulaziz University Hospital, which gave her immense satisfaction and serenity.

She felt her end was approaching, when she suddenly lost the sight in one of her eyes. The consultant ophthalmologist found nothing wrong. Similarly an MRI of the brain and the optic nerve were normal. Our Consultant Oncologist suggested lumbar puncture and CSF exam to rule spread to meninges. She refused; and said to me: I know it is leptomeningitis, and there is no need for treatment, as treatment you may only prolong suffering for 2-3 weeks.

When she was admitted for Palliative treatment, she refused the morphine and it's derivatives. She wanted to be alert to keep reciting Quran and supplication to God to the last moment.

During that time she donated 100,000 Saudi Riyals(one third of all her possessions) to Philanthropic Society in Kuwait, which was founded by the late Philanthropist Dr. Abdulrahman Alsumait who spent most of his life and work in Africa. She felt relieved when her brother told her that the Philanthropic Society has received her donation and would spend it in the allocated health and educational matters she requested. She died in peace while she and her sister recited Sura Yasin of the Holy Quran.

May God bless you in His company, for, so vast was the brilliance of faith and the light of God with which you were endowed during the time of your ordeal; that which transpired to be no less than a great blessing from God.

Posthumous

1. Her friends opened a free clinic in Darfur (Sudan) in her name. One of them saw her in a dream and Noor was very happy and told her that the clinic was opened. Two days later her friend received confirmation that the clinic was opened.
2. Another friend saw Noor in a dream on 16 December 2015 (months after her death), and said to her "I will attend a festival in Konya Turkey, to commemorate Maulana Jalaladdin Rumi, whom she loved and often read his poetry. When they looked in Google, they found this festival is held on 17th December every year in commemoration of the date of his death.
3. She kept visiting her friends and sisters in night visions and told them that she was happy.

Noor's Father
Mohammed Ali Albar

Contents

Foreword by Dr. Walid Fitaihi; (A light) For The Insightful
Preface
From Full Health to Cancer
Bombshells
Two Days of Apprehension
Moral of The Tale
On The Eve of Surgery
The Last Evening
The Evil Eye: The First Suspect
Only a Mastectomy: It Could Have Been Worse
A Hard Lesson in Reliance on God
Dear Eastern Man
How May I Thank You, O God
What People Have to Say
We and Our Children
My Hardest Decision Yet
The Magic Of Gratefulness
Chemotherapy in a New Perspective
Divine Messages
The Mountain Resort and the Leisure Pursuits Therein
Why Cancer, Amid My Pregnancy?
What If My Illness Had Been Mental, Not Physical?
How You Can Starve Cancer by What You Eat
My Spring and Hers
Bothersome Speculations
And Then, Maryam Arrived
In Hospital, Speak Good or Keep Silent
An Exceptional Person and Humane Physician
Are You Ill
Death and I
In This Frenzy of a World
Hair Loss

None Has an Exclusive Right to God
How to Eat an Elephant
Adversity Swap
The Production Line
The Badger And Mothers Nowadays
Pitiful Knowledge
Judge Shuraih
The Final Days of Radiotherapy
Living with Half a Body
What Misery It Is, to Run Away from Oneself
After Therapy is Over
We Shall All Be Fine
Your Parents Are Too Old
With My Son in The Elevator
How Much Do We Change
How to Withstand Pain
From The Confines of The Body to The Vast Realms of The Spirit
A Prayer Shall Be Answered in Due Course
Never Cease to Ask God, Regardless
After Widespread Metastasis, I Resume Work
My Body and My Spirit
Your Love And Prayers Brought Me Immense Joy
A Passing Thought by Dr. Mohammed Albar

The Author; Dr. Noor Mohammad Albar

- A physician and an academic at King Abdulaziz University - Psychiatry.
- Graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, King Abdulaziz University, 2008
- Joined the American Board of Psychiatry at Tufts University in 2012.
- Hold a license for Hypnotherapy from New England Society of Clinical Hypnosis.
- Author of a number of social articles published in Arabic newspapers and magazines.
- Owner of a popular electronic blog: www.dr-nooralbar.blogspot.com
- Established an educational and developmental club for girls and female adolescents by the name of Steps, which lasted for five years.
- Suffered breast cancer in 2013 as she was pregnant with her daughter Maryam. In 2014 the disease spread to her liver and bones.
- A wife and a mother of two: Ahmad and Maryam.

**Completed
With God's Grace**

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