

A Personal Experience

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I was born with a disease which appears gradually in the retina, therefore my eyesight grew weaker and weaker. I could not run and play like other children, and could not read except under very strong light. This is why my father photocopied books for me with large letters, and my mother kept helping me to read my lessons. My father also accompanied me on a long trip to Spain, India, China, Europe and America hoping to cure me, but to no avail. Finally, in London, my father was told the bitter truth that his daughter would lose her sight sooner or later, and that it was only a matter of time.

When I reached 14 I lost my eyesight completely. I knew the truth about my illness and tried to prepare myself. I accepted God's will and decided not to live regretting my lost eyesight but to profit from the problem and turn it to my advantage... I had gone through the elementary and middle school at one school, and the kindergarten in Jeddah, where I had adapted to and got used to the place, the people and everything else. But the real change came after that when I had to go on to the secondary classes and was not accepted in the secondary schools I had applied to. The various reasons given for refusing me put my mother and me in a difficult and painful situation, until God sent me a teacher who accepted me in her school. I started to double my efforts in studying, listening to what was being read to me.

When I sat for the first exam I got high grades which made them accept to enroll me as a regular student in the school. After that I enrolled in the literary section and was later chosen as a model student first in the school and later in the whole western district. When I received 89% in the General Secondary Certificate people around me thought that I would stop at that. But I refused and insisted on going on to university. Naturally I knew that my condition would not permit me to choose medicine or engineering, so I wanted to specialize in a branch based on discussion, dialogue and argument, and thus chose law. After graduating from university I wanted to prove myself by acquiring a superior degree and went in for post graduate studies and obtained a Doctorate in Law. My studies were in different countries, so I would go from one country to another and bear all the

difficulties I had to face in order to realize my aim. In studying I would depend on listening to what others would read to me, and this was a source of many difficulties, for it was not easy to find someone to read to me and with whom I could relax. Yet I put up with all those difficulties in order to achieve my aim and not be a passive individual and a useless member of society. Then, too, there was the difficulty of staying in the libraries for postgraduate students that forbid reading aloud in their rooms. But in spite of all these difficulties I decided to defend my MA and then my PhD thesis extemporaneously in front of a great number of people, with each defense lasting several hours.

I personally believe that if a person desires to attain a distinguished scientific and practical level he/she needs a lot of patience and defiance and should always try to make light of the thorns that come his/her way so as not to waver in front of the obstacles he/she faces, no matter how many they be. For will power, determination and belief in destiny can produce miracles. This does not mean that the way was easy and was not wrought with pain and sorrow, but I always tried to ignore them so that they would not stop me from achieving success.

After I had finished my studies I decided to work. This was a new turning point requiring a new defiance because the experience of work differed from my experience during my years of study. Work is a direct contact with others to prove one's self. This I faced still remembering the doctors' failure to treat my case, and the sorrow that overcame my family. Yet God quickly inspired me with a vision and determination, and with the insistence on realizing something that would console me in my future and be a modest price paid for my father's and mother's tears.

In aiming to excel in my studies I had decided to obtain my Doctorate in Law from the Faculty of Law at Cairo University. And having succeeded on this I realized what I had longed for. Thus ended the period I had regarded as difficult and impossible and a period started which was more difficult because it meant going out into society and proving myself outside the realm of studies, and offering what I had learnt so that other students might profit by it.

My search started by looking for an academic job. In 1998 I applied for a teaching post in King 'Abdel 'Aziz University, a firmly-established university many dream of joining. After presenting my degrees and being interviewed by the Dean of Women Students in those days, Dr. Haifa Jamal al-Layl, I was accepted as an unofficial lecturer, to be tested in case I failed. I was faced with a new challenge which I accepted.

I remember the first day at university, the students' surprise at seeing me standing blind before them, I remember the whispers from here and there, the comments that expressed admiration and astonishment. I remained silent until they had all settled down, and then started by saying that when God loves one of His creatures He tests his/her faith by depriving him/her of one of his/her gifts but makes up for it by presenting him/her with another gift. So although I do not see, I can feel every movement around me and know whence it comes. I also hope for mutual respect between us, and now let us start our lesson...

Little by little I gained the students' respect and appreciation, and this drew the attention of the administration which had been observing everything from a distance. This, although I had greatly feared the reaction of the students to a professor who would be giving them a lecture without seeing them. Students at this age differ in character and qualities, as well as in their degree of awareness and culture. Therefore, some might behave in a manner that does not become a university student, or that might harm me or, at least, hurt me. All these things occurred to me while knowing that in the university there are hundreds, even thousands of students from different backgrounds and belonging to various social classes. But at the same time I had an inner feeling that all these fears would disappear and the students would accept the situation with respect and approval.

In fact, this is what happened. So far I have taught more than 3000 students who have all shown me nothing but love, respect and pride, and many of them feel proud to have me as their teacher and consider me an example to be followed. In reality, this gives me an invaluable and priceless happiness. Some students come from other faculties to attend my lectures although they have nothing to do with their specialties, and they are all well mannered. In fact, I am very often ashamed by the excellent way in which the students treat me. The days passed quickly before I became a member of the faculty in King 'Abdel 'Aziz University, enjoying all a professor's rights and benefits and having all her responsibilities. This had been a far aim, and I had achieved it.

Through 'Abdel 'Aziz University I was given the chance to prove myself. The University's support did not stop at that, for I gained the full support and confidence of the Dean of Women Students who was appointed after the term of the previous dean who had appointed me came to an end. She appointed me Legal Advisor to the Women's Sector, not driven by pity or compassion but by a confidence gained with time.

Because I believe that a university professor's role is not limited to the university but goes beyond it to the society to which he/she belongs, I was invited by various parties to give lectures relating to legal problems concerning women. In these lectures I tried to simplify the material so that the women could understand it regardless of their standard of education. Concerning my academic future I started preparing research papers that would help me become an Associate Professor. I have already completed a few that have to do with the legal aspects of electronic commerce due to its increasing importance in modern times, and which I cannot detail now. And I still hope to open an office, offering legal advice to business women, and to establish a high-technology institute for blind girls that would train them from childhood to face their plight and to gain self confidence and participate in building their society.

In fact, the Saudi Kingdom has shown concern for educating those with special needs and has established institutions and schools to teach and train them, whether they be blind or deaf. It has also cared, and still does, to develop the institutions specialized in the mentally disabled. Some of the teaching staff in these institutions are blind teachers who had graduated from them, and some of them had continued their university education and then come back to teach in the institute in which they had been pupils. At the university level the universities accept blind students to pursue their studies in several colleges, though not in all the branches. I hope that one day all the colleges will open all their branches to the blind.

Finally I would like to add that it is deep suffering that gives birth to great dreams, and that it is these dreams that give rise to great hopes. Through the years these dreams and hopes might remain fantasies that are difficult to achieve, and might become illusions that cannot be realized and would lead to frustration and defeat. But those who can transform the dream into reality we are proud of, and when we can convert the squandered powers within ourselves into a great ability of giving which will recuperate the riches of the past and encompass the facts of the present, the future will shine in front of us in order to build our present and our children's future under the auspices of country and bounty.