

Doolhun The Bride

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Doolhun: The Bride

"This whole world is a commodity and the best of the commodities of this world is a virtuous wife": so said the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Chapter 1

Ahmed Ali is my name, and I simply must share with you this life changing event that occurred in my fifteenth year of my life.

I first met him when he came to our quiet, little rural town of Summervally in South Africa. We were surrounded by farms and he was looking for sheep for *Qurbani* (the Muslim festival of sacrifice in commemoration of Abraham, peace be upon him). An acquaintance of my father's, we knew him as Jaffar *Chacha* (paternal uncle). He was not a relative but my father taught us to address the elderly respectfully. Jaffar Chacha was around sixty and he seemed like a very ordinary man, his language, his dress, his demeanour was simple. He had travelled to us by public transport and not a personal vehicle. He joked, he laughed and at times he sat silently and listened to what others were talking about.

That night, my brother Abdullah, and I were excited because we had the opportunity to light a fire and *braai* (Traditional South African barbecue where meat is

cooked over burning coals) so as to entertain our guest. There is not much to do in a town such as ours and we looked forward to guests. As we were gathered around the fire, I noticed that Jaffar Chacha was wearing a throw-over or poncho by Versace. That's odd, I thought to myself. Everything else about Jaffar Chacha was simple, cheap and ordinary but this garment, by Versace, stuck out like a sore thumb so I said: "Jaffar Chacha, you have a lovely Versace poncho."

He looked at me all confused and asked, "What's a Vichasie?"

We burst out laughing at his pronunciation of Versace and he too laughed with us. I brought his attention to the pattern on the border of his poncho and explained that it was owned by a company called Versace. He then said in a surprised tone, "Hah, I am wearing a branded garment for twenty five years and I did not even know." I chuckled and said to him, "Don't worry Chacha, this is the stuff of our generation."

He then put his hand to his forehead, raised his face to the sky and said in a quiet, almost astonished tone, "She gave me a Versace."

My elder brother Abdullah asked, "Who gave it to you?" "Sorry..." he said, "was just thinking out loud."

"Aaaah!" the boys complained in unison, "Tell us please."

My dad grinned, "Jaffar *Bhai* (brother) the cats out of the bag so you may as well tell them the whole story or else they won't leave you alone."

...And so he began, "I start with the name of our Creator, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful so as to add blessings to my story...

Boys, I know a little bit about branded garments but I never cared much for it." He paused to stoke the fire, "In fact, I hate to wear such garments because of the showing off aspect but when it comes to quality and comfort, I think it is value for money. Anyway, I was 10 years into my marriage and my *Doolhun* (bride), that's what I call my wife, gave me this Versace." He indicated to the poncho, "Someone had given it to her and she, to me. It was a special moment because it was the first time that she gave me a gift and I reciprocated by giving her one of my prized possessions which had huge sentimental value. It was not like the Versace she gave me, my present was old; it was cheap, but it was extremely precious to me; priceless. Just like her gift, mine too was something that someone special gave to me."

"Wow, Chacha! A special moment!" Abdullah said teasingly.

"Yes." He said and his eyes and his smile gave the impression that he was reminiscing the exchange, "Yesssss! This giving and taking was a very spontaneous thing, a very special moment in our lives. We had reached an informal milestone in our marriage. I don't know about her side, but from mine - I was just getting to like her." When he saw our shocked and confused

reaction to his words he put up his hands in a stopping gesture and said: "I know, I know! You think I am crazy: 10 years of marriage and someone then starts to like his wife and sincerely exchange presents for the first time. Now that I talk about it, I too think I was crazy."

"I tell you- this is nothing," he continued, "Some parts of my life are even crazier."

"Jaffar Chacha," I said: "Now we are really curious. Please, please tell us more."

"Well okay!" He paused for a moment then began, "There is a lot you young people can learn from us older people." He said as he stroked his ancient white beard with a pleasant, distant look on his face.

"A wise person is he who could learn from others and not make the same mistakes. You only get one shot at life and when you get to my age you just have to live by the outcome of the choices you made in youth because there is no way one can change things in old age. Look, take me as an example; I am sixty now. How much time do I have left - ten or twenty years at most and I do not have the strength or energy to do what I did in my youth. So boys, it's Important for you to think carefully in your youth, especially about what you want to achieve with the sum total of your life and try to do things right so that when you get to old age you would be happy, fulfilled."

We were silent for a moment thinking over what he had said.

"So, the craziest day of my life was the day I was getting married. I was really worried, not outwardly, but maybe I am using the wrong words. I won't say terrified but rather a very intense, serious, thoughtful mood, which was inappropriate for an occasion like this. The wedding celebrations were in full swing the night before and I was in no mood for fun and socializing. I went through the motions with a painted smile but every free moment, I spent alone with my worrying thoughts... Gosh, am I doing the right thing. I am getting married to someone I barely know, someone I could hardly relate too and definitely don't love. I beseeched my Creator for help. I don't even know if I slept at all that night because these thoughts kept going through my mind the way a blinded ox turns a milling wheel. The next day, my wedding day, things were no better. As I said, I was different, I never conformed to how others did things. Maybe I should reword this to tell you more precisely what I mean by this. I don't want you to get the wrong impression. I do conform, I am a stickler for details, I hate to part from the guidelines of my religion because I see such great wisdom in it, but everyone around me seems to have parted from this and made me look like an outcast.

In a group event such as a wedding, I could not have it all my way and there was a lot that I did, and put up with simply because people would not let me do things any other way. Society is strange, if you are wealthy and you want to upgrade to a fancy wedding, no one will

complain but if you are simple and want to downgrade and do things simply then everyone has a problem. Our religion teaches us to live simple lives and this is what I wanted to do. As an example, this whole stage bit did not appeal to me at all but I went with the flow. After the wedding ceremony and being paraded like prized bulls on stage, we got down to my wife's soon to be ex-home to pick up her belongings and say our goodbyes. She had come to the hall in a big, fancy Mercedes Benz and now she was travelling in the car I had come with, a fairly new car but the bottom of the range economy sort of car. This had been arranged by my father. It's left to be wondered what sort of arrangement I would have made had I ventured into this department."

Everybody laughed around the fire.

"I'm certain it wouldn't have been a Mercedes Benz, one better than the one she travelled in." Abdullah laughed.

"Maybe one of the cars from our yard." Jaffar chacha contended, "Although, they were all near the end of life's ceaseless, conveyer belt's journey, to the recycling heap."

"Profound words, Jaffar bhai!"

"Jaffar chacha," I interjected, "but you are the main man, the groom, the star of the day, you have to dress

and be smart for such an occasion and move in a flashy car!"

He smiled and said: "Yes, I know but if you listen to my story then you would know that this living to impress others is not only wrong and childish but it also does not get you the best out of life. In fact it messes up one's life."

He went on to say: "You are also right, my child. You made me realise that my dad's way was the best. Not extreme on either side, but a balanced way, a middle path, hurt no one, no conflicts, the job done. I wish I had learnt this lesson earlier in my life, it would have been so much easier, so much more fruitful. But, then again, had I been like that, then I would have no story to tell."

He paused and sipped on his water. "Now where was I?! Ah yes, my wife's soon to be ex home... While she was gathering her belongings, my father-in-law held my hand and took me to a quiet corner. I was not expecting what came next." Jaffar chacha's eyes went wide like he was still surprised after all these years by what had happened.

"With tears in his eyes and in a choking voice, my father-in-law pleadingly said just six words that would stay in my head for the rest of my life, 'Promise! Please look after my baby!' That was it." He paused and looked at us to gauge our reaction. We all just stared back at him wide eyed waiting for him to continue..."For a

fleeting moment I felt what he felt, my daughter's life in the hands of another, and I thought to myself, Jaffar, what have you gotten yourself into. If you don't love you new wife then how will you be able to do justice to her. How would you be able to uphold the promise this old man extracted from you so easily, yet so very deeply. In just a few seconds he shook my heart and made me think and feel like I never did before. Oh *Allah* (our Creator in Arabic) what have I done!" Jaffar chacha stared up to the heavens as he said this last part.

Abdullah, the talkative one, exclaimed: "Woah," are you serious Jaffar Chacha, "You married someone you did not love?! but that makes no sense."

"I know," he replied, "but you tell me if two people are in love, how can they end up divorced?"

Immediately the thought of Salim came to my mind. He really loved his wife, but after just three years of marriage she pushed him for a divorce and left him devastated.

Jaffar Chacha marrying a woman he did not love; him not wanting a fancy wedding or branded clothing; him not caring for good cars, it all just did not make sense to me. These are the things I want and I am pretty certain that this is what everyone wants. Then the sad, broken Salim came to mind again. I just did not know what to say so I shrugged my shoulders and asked, "But why?"

"Don't get me wrong," Jaffar Chacha said: "Love is the best and the greatest of all human emotions. It is what our Creator loves the most but true love is not based on appearances or charm."

He sipped some more water and continued, "And the other more important thing, we should love for the sake of Allah and not for ourselves. This is true love that never wanes."

"Jaffar Chacha, controlling our love, it just does not sound like love." Abdullah interjected, "I mean, it sounds like there is no passion to it."

"Don't let those thoughts deceive you boys. Unfortunately, we today know very little of love, it's not only complex but, if we get it right, it is also far deeper and all consuming, far more than what we could ever imagine, a really wonderful state to be in." Jaffar chacha stared deeply into the burning coals of the fire.

"Unfortunately what you also need to consider is that love of the highest degree is not possible with just anyone and what's worse is that if you give your heart to the wrong person then you could end up hurt and this hurt is far worse than physical pain or, to me, even death. Ah... just the thought of a broken heart makes my entire being shake," and as he was saying this, his voice quivered, his eyes turned blood shot and all of this

seemed to have made what he was saying so intense. I could almost feel it!

"You know boys," he said: "if you give a child a hundred rand note, the child would probably squash the note and put it into his mouth. Why? Because the child does not know the value of money. Similarly if you give your heart to someone who does not know the value of it then you could end up with a broken heart."

Jaffar Chacha was making sense but... to hell with it, let me just ask him. "Jaffar Chacha, did you find this love with all these conditions attached? I mean, do you love your wife now?"

"Look", Jaffar Chacha said: "let me tell you a little more and then you be the judge if I love my wife or not." Just then my father ushered us to the table to eat.

Doolhun, The Bride

Seeing through deception is not easy. It's like being able to see a white strand of hair in milk or seeing a black ant on a moonless night on a black rock.

Chapter 2

After supper of our braai'd delicacies, we once again gathered around the fire. Our enthusiasm had encouraged Jaffar Chacha and he continued, "I have never related such personal life events to anyone but by saying it out loud I'm learning about myself and I'm hoping that I can teach you all a little about life and it's true purpose." He chuckled and said, "I hope my story is not too boring!"

"Absolutely not, Jaffar chacha," Abdullah not missing a beat interjected, "As much as I was enjoying the meat, I was eagerly waiting for supper to be over so you could continue."

"Jee (yes) chacha, we want to know all about this Doolhun you married."

"Okay," Jaffar chacha continued, "But I just want to say one thing before I continue. Islam teaches us not to expose our good deeds because bragging can lead to pride and we must also remain shameful when we sin and not reveal it to others. We must also be conscious

and not think or talk bad of others. Such actions have a negative influence on our characters."

After pausing to sip on some water, he continued, "In telling my story, I am going to tell you a lot about mine and my wife's strengths and weaknesses with the sole purpose of teaching you from our life experiences." His deep brown eyes went darker as he grew serious, "At the end, what truly matters is intention. May Allah guide me and forgive my sins. Ameen!"

His tone lightened as he continued, "Back to my story... I spent many a long hour and many a long day trying to figure out why I am the way I am. What prompted me to marry a woman I did not love or barely even knew? Don't get me wrong, I did not hate her either. I was just neutral towards her. Definitely none of the mooning and obsession you see in a Bollywood movie. No itch in my heart that I could not scratch or whatever else they say about love."

We all chuckled at his mention of Bollywood and my father began singing a Bollywood love song: "*Lejayengi, Lejayengi, dilwale Doolhuniya lejayengi....*" (*he will take, he will take, the person who loves, will take the bride*). Our chuckles turned into full-on laughter at his off-key notes.

Jaffar Chacha patted him on the back laughing uproariously.

We quietened down again and he continued, "My Doolhun and I had nothing in common. She barely ever spoke so, even if we did have something in common, how could I have known and yet here we were, committing to spending the rest of our lives together. These were the thoughts that plagued my mind on our wedding day.

You're probably wondering why I was getting married to my Doolhun if I felt this way. I know I certainly was. The truth is that I was trapped into getting married. But not the way you are probably thinking... let's go back to the beginning, my youth, my experience with the opposite gender. Maybe then, it will become clear how I came to be in such a situation.

Ah my childhood," Jaffar chacha had a distant but happy look on his face, "I can't say for sure, but I think I am reasonably good looking, not now." He said humorously, stroking his white beard, "but back then in my youth, and I am pretty certain that at one point in my life I almost had the opportunity of having all these feelings of love or infatuation.

I was sweet sixteen, owned a flashy red Raleigh racing bicycle and the freedom to go where I wanted. Life was perfect. One of my favourite haunts was the local swimming pool where I gradually got familiar with a girl around my age. We did not say much to each other but

as the days went by we had worked out each other's timings and on this one, particular day we got it right."

We all sat up straight with bated breath waiting for him to continue. Even my father was barely breathing.

"As I rode towards the pool, there she was and when she saw me," he paused, "I am sure you know of the magic that flows through eyes. Her whole body reacted, I think involuntary - she like squirmed, she smiled and she blushed all the way to her hairline. When I saw her reaction to me, I knew I was getting it right."

While Jaffar Chacha was relating this part, I began to feel guilty, my palms began to perspire, my mouth began to dry up and I just could not help but shift in my seat. I tried to suppress my cough but I just could not. My guilt was caused because I was in a similar situation currently. I peeked looks at the adults but they did not seem to notice my discomfort, *Shukar Allah*. (Thanks Allah)

Jaffar Chacha went on with his story, "The next day, just before three, I was on my bicycle at a crossroad, one road led towards the pool where this girl was probably waiting for me and the other road, in the opposite direction, led towards my cousin's home.

This whole dilemma had been on my mind for the past 24 hours. Just like the literal crossroad my body was at, my mind was at figurative crossroad. One was obviously

this intensely alluring inclination towards the pool with this girl waiting for me. The other was my nagging conscience. Am I doing the right thing?"

He paused and looked at all of our faces as if we had the answers, "For one, she was not a Muslim. I knew that this would upset my mum terribly. She would most certainly bring the roof down on top of me. One of the things I really wanted was a wife that my mother would be pleased with and one that got along well with her. This girl was not it.

Besides her not having the same faith as myself, she was modern. She dressed inappropriately... immodestly. Despite my own past mistakes, I was hoping to turn over a new leaf and become more religious. This girl would not help my situation. I had finally gotten myself out of the gutter and I was not happy about being dragged back there.

Please do not misinterpret me... She was probably a good person but I was making a change in my life towards being more responsible, more Allah-conscious and this girl, flaunting her wares, was just not fitting into where I needed to be."

Jaffar Chacha talking about provocative dressing made me look towards my brother and I knew by the smirk on his face that he was itching to crack a joke. I knew him to be witty and one hell of a naughty guy but in the

presences of my father, he was forced to rein it in. Poor Abdullah! He must be bursting at the seams trying to restrain himself and I could not help but giggle under my breath.

Jaffar Chacha went on: "It took me years to really understand what I had went through in these formative years of my life and it is only in recent times that I am able to fully understand and express these thoughts. Some cultures call such experiences, like my crossroad dilemma, yin and yang.

In Islam though, we believe that we, humans, have two conflicting parts to our make-up. One is our carnal, selfish, worldly self and the other is our good, selfless, self-conscious spiritual side. In short, a good side and an evil side. As to our worldly side, it encourages us towards materialism; seeking recognition and having a good time. It is about satisfying our worldly needs and desires. In its extremities, it leads towards evil. This is the easier path to follow because it is attractive, glitzy and glamorous and the results, though short-term, are immediate.

I mean, who wouldn't want to be wealthy, living in a beautiful house, with a trophy spouse, driving a smart car and with a few degrees to their name. Going to the pool with this girl waiting for me, big romance, glitzy, easy win. This had to be the carnal desires of my worldly self!"

He stopped for a moment deep in thought, "The other part of our spiritual make up, the self-conscious side, communicates by warning us when we are doing something wrong. Its way of expression is different from the urgent demanding voice of the worldly self. It is more subtle, very gentle, much like a perfect, noble teacher of the highest calibre. It does not force its knowledge but rather warns by way of a sixth-sense and leaves the decision-making to us. It is also extremely sensitive in that it communicates once and if one does not heed the advice, it does not repeat itself. One has to be in tune with one's own self to recognize the warnings and learn from this part of our beings.

So be extremely mindful, once we disregard our conscience on a subject matter, it will no longer caution us regarding it. We simply cannot afford to lose our conscience because it removes our HUMANITY."

Jaffar Chacha went on, "Just as day and night cannot co-exist so too, evil and good cannot co-exist. One has to choose their path. What's even worse is that once we have chosen the path of our carnal self, we do not want to know about the other path. It becomes repulsive to us and this makes our worldly side stronger.

So for me, my conscience was against me pursuing a relationship with this girl."

While Jaffar Chacha was talking, I thought about what he said and how much sense he made but I was very afraid because I just could not see how I could overcome my worldly desires. It seemed like a tall order with very little to gain at this point.

Jaffar chacha was saying, "These internal conversations with this selfless side of our being is not like our ordinary day-to-day communication where we use words. It's different... a feeling from within ourselves." Jaffar chacha paused to sip on his water and then continued,

"To better explain this, I need to tell you about another childhood incident. Whenever I went swimming I used swimming shorts that came to my knees. One day, I lost them and before I could replace them a friend of mine came along and insisted that I come along to the pool with him.

When I told him that I did not have swimming attire he offered to lend me his spare one. It was a tiny, brief like costume and when I put it on in the change room I felt extremely uncomfortable, almost naked. I quickly wrapped my towel around my waist and walked down to the pool. I clearly remember looking all around to see if anyone was watching. I quickly threw off the towel and jumped into the pool when I thought the coast was clear.

It so happened that I used the same costume the next day, but this time it was completely different. I felt proud and confident showing off my thighs as I ran down the stairs towards the pool. My towel carelessly slung over my shoulder this time.

This change in feelings got my attention. It made me wonder why I had felt so shy the day before as oppose to my newfound confidence today. What had changed? *Alhamdulillah* (all praise is due to our Creator), I did not ignore this change but pondered over it for quite some time. That shy feeling was my conscience speaking to me. It was not by words but by feelings.

I gradually came to the realisation that the day I donned that brief like costume in public, I had lost a part of that pristine, in-built shame or modesty forever. I knew that I could never regain it. On the other hand I experienced something priceless. There is something within us all, that tells us when we are wrong, our conscience. To me, this is our good spiritual side."

I was surprised that I could relate so well to what Jaffar Chacha was saying. I had also experienced such feelings of guilt. I had done some wrong things in my life too. I remember feeling really bad when my friend had somehow convinced me to break my fast in *Ramadaan* (the 9th month of the Islamic calendar in which Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to sunset). Those feelings were very strong prior to breaking my

fast and even after. I pray that my Creator forgives me for this.

Jaffar Chacha went on: "I experienced conflicting feelings of guilt and happiness on many other occasions. Sadly, I did and still do a lot of wrong. However, whenever I was in the gutter, sometimes for years, I would never condone my wrong actions or overlook them.

Yes, sometimes I made the same mistake repeatedly but I always knew that it was wrong. I would always plead with my Creator to help me out. Initially, He gave me the courage and strength to pull myself out and what I learnt from all of this, was that I was weak and I needed Allah's help. He, later, gave me guidance in the form of a Spiritual Guide. But that is a story for later, *Insha-Allah* (Allah willing.)" Jaffar chacha had more of a sad look throughout when recalling his past but suddenly when he mentioned his Spiritual Guide his demeanour changed entirely. He instantly cheered up.

"Ultimately, these nagging feelings at the back of my mind were pushing me along a certain path. I knew that the road to the pool was going back into the gutter. It was what my selfish, carnal desires wanted.

With a heavy heart and every ounce of my inner being, I mustered up the courage to turn my bike towards my cousin's house. I never went back to the pool for the

next two years. In all the times that I had experienced these inner conflicts, it was really difficult to give up what my worldly side wanted. I suppose it was like this because my carnal-self wanted something tangible and outwardly pleasing, and what my spiritual-self wanted was obscure. There was nothing to look forward to - a complete blank."

Jaffar Chacha's words took me back to my own thoughts just a few moments ago of passionate, carnal desires and the best of worldly possessions. I couldn't help myself, I didn't know much about spirituality. Other than hearing my father make mention to the '*nafs*' (a part of human make up - carnal desires) on occasion, I didn't even know we had two conflicting sides to us. For me personally, I just wasn't attracted to spiritual things and I suppose that this is because I don't know much about it. That makes me wonder how come growing up as a Muslim I wasn't more exposed to it. It seems like something of paramount importance - Overcoming the evil within us.

"Over the next few years, there were a few other girls that attracted my attention. All of them were of the same religion as myself. Even amongst them, I was more attracted to the modern girls and their physical appearance - The type that appeals to one's carnal desires. Somehow I had managed to hold my ground and did not get involved with them."

Jaffar Chacha was going on with his story, "I could not differentiate between my worldly desires and my Spiritual needs at that point in my life. Despite this, somewhere deep down in my subconscious, I wanted someone with a good character, not a superficial person engrossed in their physical appearance. But maybe it had more to do with me finding a wife that pleased my mother."

Jaffar chacha was such an interesting yet unassuming individual. I wouldn't have guessed that this seemingly ordinary person had such interesting life experiences and such a wealth of knowledge to share.

"Things were simpler in our days. Most of the time, our family members found us matches. This isn't the case anymore. I can't speak ill of anyone but I will share some of my experiences for the sake of making you boys aware of what to expect." He paused, deep in thought for a moment and then continued,

"Once, I tried getting the best of both by trying to convince one of the modern girls I had met to become more religious. But she turned me down. And I am ever so grateful for it. I was wrong to try to satisfy both my worldly and spiritual needs in one person. That's just not possible. Furthermore, had she been convinced, it would've been for me and not for the sake of the Creator." Jaffar chacha looked at us seriously and went on,

"Another girl I had met was more religious but that hadn't worked out either. It made me come to the realisation that sometimes, a person might put up a front to sell his or herself. Especially in a situation like a prospective relationship.

This is something we should be cautious and aware of. For instance, someone might give the impression that they are very religious but the reality might be far from that. Therefore, we should humbly seek guidance from our Creator whenever we are making big decisions in our lives. We are just human. We can be easily fooled."

"Very true Jaffar Bhai. That is a reality of life. You get all sorts of people. It's scary how easily one can be fooled by outward appearances."

My father, who had been quietly listening, now spoke up. "Boys, pay close attention to these lessons. Not many are so fortunate as to get such golden advice in their youth."

Jaffar Chacha nodded in agreement as he went on, "People manipulate others for their own interests and the astonishing thing is that, some such people use religion. This makes me very cautious of religious people and leaders. It is for this reason that the greatest prayer of a Muslim, *Surah Al Fatiha* (1st chapter of The Holy Quran) contains a prayer to be saved from people that mislead."

I was thinking that Jaffar Chacha was just making a mountain out of a mole hill. I don't think anyone could be that callous. I mean, that's down right evil - to mislead someone knowingly and purposely for one's own gain and that too, using religion.

Jaffar chacha was saying: "Initially, I found it strange that the verse praying to be guided by the righteous is followed immediately by the verse praying to be saved from those that mislead. It's like telling someone to take a right turn and then following it by saying do not take a left turn.

It did not make sense to me at all but, because it was in the Holy Quran, I gave it a great deal of thought trying to figure out the reason for this. I realised that this is a serious warning. We are going to bump into such people and they will test our faith." Jaffar chacha looked earnestly into the dying embers of coal.

When I considered that there were cult leaders that actually got their followers to commit mass suicide then it slowly began to make sense. These people, under the guise of religion, are actually misguiding earnest people and they can be so convincing that they lead their followers to commit suicide!"

I wondered if it were possible for someone to brain wash me into committing suicide but then I recalled reading an article by a journalist who studied the lives of

the people who had committed suicide in this instance. He had found that they had been good, sincere, hard-working people and not idiots. I felt a shiver run down my spine. This sure was scary. I need to take precautions against such deception. What did Jaffar chacha say... Surah Fatiha!

While these thoughts were running through my mind, Jaffar Chacha's story continued: "The mere fact that there are so many different religions and so many different sects within each religion shows just how influential wrong people can be. There is only one and can only be one right way. Where did all these other ways come from? It had to have stemmed from such people that mislead."

He paused for a moment as if weighing whether to go on, "When I was young, around seventeen, I tried figuring out the right way by looking at the different religions and sects and I finally gave up because it was just too complex. I finally placed my trust in my Creator and pleaded with Him to guide and help me.

This works for me and I strongly feel that it would work for everyone. Why follow me? Why follow him?" He indicated to Abdullah as a reference, "The right thing to do is to follow our Creator through our conscience. He alone is present at all times. He sees all. He hears all. He knows all, even our most intimate thoughts and He is

ever ready to guide and help us. All it takes is for us to turn to Him and sincerely ask Him to guide us.

So even in choosing a life partner, I was using the same principal - asking my Creator to guide me and going with the flow. I must admit it was scary not knowing where I was going but I had to have faith and trust in my Almighty Creator.

Anyway, nothing had come off this encounter with this, seemingly pious girl or any of the others I had met.

At twenty four, just as I was getting accustomed to being a bachelor and enjoying it, my mother popped the big question. 'It's time for you to get married. Do you have anyone?' I told her no and after she made sure that I was not being coy, she set about finding someone for me. Even her way of finding a life partner for me was not as straightforward as it seemed. It came with a whole set of new problems as you will see."

Doolhun, The Bride.

I offered my condolences to the elderly gentleman who had just lost his wife of forty years. He sighed and said: "Jaffar Bhai, its like I lost a part of myself!" and he silently sobbed.

Chapter 3

"Jaffar Chacha, not many people would think so much about choosing a spouse. Most would just go with the flow." Jaffar chacha's story had awakened a lot of my own thoughts.

"I suppose I would have been like that too had I not been influenced by certain factors and people." He replied. "At that point of my life, I knew so little about marriage but unconsciously there were a whole lot of background factors that were influencing me without my even realising it.

Firstly my religion, I knew that marriage was the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and he very strongly recommended it. Then, it was my mother. From my observations of others, I noticed that most daughter's-in-law did not get along with their mother's-in-law and this just did not make sense to me. I did not want a problem like this with my mum. Why should I build a new relationship at the expense of an existing one, especially one as important

as that of my mother's. Not only is this going against common sense but it goes against all religions. So I was left with one option; find a wife that will get along with my mum. And my mum was no patsy, believe me." He chuckled fondly, "If something was wrong, she would not hesitate to air her thoughts.

Now besides all of this, the so called modern, democratic, western culture as depicted in movies also had an underlying influence on me. Movies downplayed marriage and instead encouraged people to just follow their lusts, find a charming, beautiful girl and shack up. Have many relationships at once or even go for a homosexual relationship; it just encouraged people to seek a life that pleases their carnal desires. Basically, this way is anti-religion, no rules, no ethics and no morals. It influences people down the wrong path. By promoting this, it's easy for the western culture to win over followers because it appeals to our evil, carnal desires - glitzy and glamorous. It is for this reason that I was attracted to certain types of girls in my youth and not to my Doolhun, who you will come to learn, never displayed her adornments or flaunted herself."

"Ooooh Jaffar Chacha that's too complicated." Abdullah was shaking his head laughing, "You are attracted to modern women but you want a '*haari poyri*' (pious woman) who will make your mother happy!" We all burst out laughing at his terminology. It was as funny as it was true though.

We settled down again and Jaffar Chacha continued, "I did not know this then, but now, with all my experience, I think that marriage is one of the most important aspects of life because it deeply influences and shapes not only the individual but also the spouse, children and even society at large. It is therefore not something that should be based on appearances, sugar-coated words; money or nobility. It's not something we should treat lightly either. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that one should choose a wife based on piety and not on looks, nobility or wealth.

The spousal relationship is the most intimate of all our worldly relationships. It is the closest we can ever get to interacting with another human being. What we sometimes fail to realise is that it is far more than just a physical relationship. The physical aspect is just one small part. The emotional, the spiritual and the influence it has over our children are aspects that are far greater, far more important and far more satisfying too. Provided we get it right, of course. The modern, democratic way offers us no teachings or guidelines on this very important relationship. Religion on the other hand, takes the man/woman relationship very seriously. It teaches rules and guidelines that not only ensure successful relationships but also brings out the very best in us and offers us the very best of life."

Jaffar Chacha's words took me back to my own fathers' words regarding marriage. He had said that marriage is

an important part of our religion and there are many Quraanic verses as well as Sunnath teachings surrounding it. Our Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that "marriage is half of faith" and "marriage is my way and those who do not marry are not of me". Associating marriage with faith: This is something of grave importance. I was also influenced by western media and led to believe that the punishment for adultery in Islam, which is stoning to death, to be harsh. But now, after listening to Jaffar Chacha views, I am beginning to realise that marriage is like the foundation of society and it needs to be protected in every possible way. It also makes me realise how easily we are fooled by western media.

"Jaffar Bhai, I am so happy to hear you say such things. These are not just theories but today, what's happening at grass-root level proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that marriage and stable, loving families are all important for the well-being of individuals, families and society. After talking to quite a few domestic maids, I have noticed that the absence of marriage in this community is really setting them back. They all pretty much had the same answers to all of my questions. "Yes" they had children. And "No" they weren't married. Most of them did not know where the father of their children were. Almost all of those who had more than one child, had them from different men. And the saddest part, these children grew up away from both their father and mother. They were sent to the farm to

live with Gogo (granny in Zulu) because their mothers are forced to work as maids to support their children financially. The fathers, on the other hand, have moved on with other women. Most of the fathers take no responsibility for their children. Living without marriage has resulted in the breakdown of the family structure and has trapped this community in an endless, vicious cycle of poverty, doing the most menial of jobs."

Jaffar Chacha nodded his head in agreement and said: "Exactly, and what's worse is that this attitude towards the spousal relationship has robbed the children of a good; loving stable environment in which to grow up in. More often than not Gogo is elderly and has lots of grandchildren to take care of. This leads to inadequate supervision and teenage pregnancies in most of the young girls. The deep psychological harm that dysfunctional families cause to children can never be quantified. The emotional trauma leaves lifelong scars. No one ever talks about it and even if they do, it's just a tip of the mountain of pain they hide within themselves."

"True" Jaffar bhai! An acquaintance of mine mentioned his son's instability since his marriage ended. Not only does he wet his underwear even now as an adult but he has gone on to wreak havoc in the lives of those around him. This gave me a tiny glimpse into the distress and trauma that children from broken homes experience."

"Hey! I rather catch a hiding than to be a child in a broken home!" Abdullah chipped in.

"True!" Jaffar Chacha responded. "The emotional pain never heals. When we are children, our parents are very special to us. We really look up to them. They are our super heroes, like gods to us. I just cannot imagine the pain it would have caused me to see my parents argue or to live with the fact that one of my parents cheated in their marriage to the detriment of the other. The bottom line, our relationship with the opposite sex is not something we should treat lightly because it is not about gratifying our lusts only but people's hearts and feelings are also involved."

From Jaffar Chacha's talks, I was beginning to understand why he had had such difficulty choosing his wife.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "From a positive aspect, just to show how important marriage is, My dad, may Allah, the Most Compassionate, shower him with blessings, was a simple shoemaker. He did not earn much but he stayed in his marriage and both my parents always took care of us eight children, in every possible way and it is because of their hard work that not only did we have a good start in life but we also followed their example to do the same for our families too."

Jaffar Chacha was reminding me of what my father had taught me about marriage. He said that marriage is sacred, holy, it is a vow made in the presence of our Creator and we should not treat it lightly but put everything into it to make it a success. He said that we are dealing with people's hearts and by breaking marriages we are hurting this seat of love and this affects our Creator (because we are hurting His creation).

Meanwhile Jaffar Chacha continued: "As I said I did not know all of this about marriage back then. I could have easily taken a wrong turn at so many different junctions in my life when it came to this aspect. So, my religion, the modern western way, me wanting to please my mum; were all factors that were pulling me in different directions when it came to finding a wife." He paused pondering over his thoughts. "I know for certain that everything I went through in finding a wife, was Allah's way of guiding me in His own mysterious way and it was simply because I always prayed to Him to guide me and I trusted and firmly believed that He would and He did.

So, back to my mum now to see how she was getting along in finding my Doolhun.

Doolhun, The Bride

DESTINY, just a few seconds delay or a few millimetres apart can be the difference between life and death.

Chapter 4

"Goolam bhai, I'm really enjoying my evening. You and your boys are great company and the meal was superb. *Jazakallah!*" (A term to say thank you while remembering our Creator). Jaffar Chacha thanked my father profusely.

I was happy that he was enjoying himself. It made me feel good. I was also enjoying his company and his story... the new dimensions he was adding to my mind and the feelings he stirred up in me. It made me feel alive.

"Jaffar Chacha," I called out. "Your account of the spousal relationship was very deep and insightful. I had never thought about it like that. It's so impactful and mind boggling. It actually makes the modern; western outlook seem so backward. Now more than ever, I am really itching to hear about how you met your wife and how it turned out. Judging from what you have already said I am certain that it's going to be very interesting."

Jaffar Chacha laughed and said: "Son it is very fascinating and it is not because I am smart but it is because of Allah's guidance, His wisdom is embedded in

everything. Anyway, my mother told me that she was going to approach a cousin of mine. She really was aiming high. I am referring to this girl's looks, she was very beautiful with a pleasant demeanour but I knew that my mum did not stand a chance. However, I must admit, I did toy with the thought of a deal like this being accepted." We all held our breaths waiting to hear if she was the one.

"The balloon popped. I must say that my mum had guts. It's not easy to make an approach like this. She either thought very highly of me or she just started from the top and came down. I myself, wasn't surprised that she refused."

"Next, another cousin offered my mum her daughter's hand in marriage to me. I knew her and she was charming and pretty. I would have said yes without even thinking, but my mum turned down the proposal without even consulting me. My mother later revealed that she turned down the proposal because the girl's parents were really shady characters. I had felt that I was marrying the girl and not her parents. I now know that family upbringing has a huge impact on children's lives. I am certain that, had I married their daughter, they would have messed up my life. This failed proposal did not bother me either because my first criterion was someone that my mother would be happy with."

"Jaffar chacha you on the *Samoosa run*!" Abdullah interjected and everyone burst out laughing including Jaffar chacha. "*Samoosa run*" was a local term dubbing the whole match-making process. A man and his family would visit a prospective partner's home and meet her and her family over tea and almost always... Samosas. Hence the term; "*samoosa run*".

"You agreed to an arranged marriage, it's no wonder you were worried about how your marriage would turn out on your wedding day." I said to him once everyone had quietened down.

Jaffar Chacha smiled and said: "My son, my marriage and the concerns I had were far more complicated than just an arranged marriage. I will come to that part shortly and you will see for yourself. As for the arranged marriage, I was not only cool with it but I actually preferred it in many ways.

Please don't get me wrong. Choosing one's own spouse in other ways can be good providing its done in a good, decent way and I tried finding a spouse on my own with no luck.

To me, it was not just about finding a spouse but it was also about pleasing my parents and trying to understand life. You see there is so much more to life. We have to figure out who we are and why we behave in certain ways. Then, what is the purpose of our lives, do we have

a Creator and if so, how do I get to know Him? The answers to such questions lie in everything we do. In my case, this whole episode of searching for a spouse and marriage was also a means of attaining answers to all these mysteries of life.

I will be the first to admit how scary it is to leave things to pan out by itself but it comes with all the thrills of an adventure into the unknown and there is so much more to learn and experience. I suppose that an arranged marriage suited me just fine because somehow this was my attitude to life with most things. I travel uncharted waters, not aiming for anything in particular. I must add that I did not plan on getting a lifetime partner to be so unplanned either. It just happened.

My father said to him, "Jaffar Bhai, I am so glad that you took your mother into consideration. One of my favourite verses of the holy Quran is the fifteenth verse of chapter forty six in which Allah commands us to be good to our parents."

"All praises is due to our Creator," Jaffar Chacha said, "I tried my best in caring for my parents. May Allah forgive me for any shortcomings in this department." While saying this, his voice faltered and tears began to fill his eyes. His emotions made my own eyes swell with tears. I stole a glance at my dad and he too was wiping away tears. I thought of my sweet mother as I'm sure they did too. A heart-felt prayer ran through my mind: May Allah

bless every strand of my mother's beautiful hair,
Ameen!

Jaffar Chacha, his head drooping, amidst his sniffles and wiping away his tears went on in a very soft voice, almost inaudible: "The running between Saffa and Marwa on the pilgrimage of *Haj* is a reminder to all of humanity of the mothers anguish for the well-being of her child" After what seemed like eternity, he went on "Because of his duty to his mother, the great saint, Owais Quarni, May Allah bless him, did not go out to meet the Holy Prophet Muhammad, even though it meant everything to him." With great effort, Jaffar Chacha straighten up and said: "The bottom line, serving our parents, especially our mothers comes first and as we saw in this example, Allah has made serving our mothers one of the highest way of serving Him."

We were all just too emotional even Abdullah had red, swollen eyes. There seemed to be no end to this topic. The whistling of the kettle brought us back to reality. "You can't beat that aroma of freshly brewed tea." My father said swirling the teapot over the reignited flames.

I took over pouring out the tea as we regained our composure.

Abdullah ventured: "Jaffar Chacha, we are still waiting to hear about how you met your wife."

Jaffar Chacha took a sip of his tea and continued, "I don't know how my mum did it from her bedroom. Without leaving home and without a telephone, she managed to find another prospective bride within a short space of time and this was not family. In the short space of time that I talked to her I really grew to like her and I had my heart set on marrying her. I liked her not only cosmetically but she could talk and she was good company. I must add, I am a realist. The first girl my mum had approached was out of my league. This girl however, I felt was very much in my league, she was not drop-dead gorgeous but reasonable looking."

Abdullah and I giggled at his choice of words and he didn't seem to notice or mind.

"When she refused my proposal the next day, I was hurt and angry. I suppose I felt this way because I had expected a positive answer. Now that I think on it, I am glad it did not work out. I promise you, it's not a case of sour grapes but rather I feel that because of my attraction towards her, there was a possibility that I may have given in to her too much. I would've become her lapdog or even worse... a slave to her." He shuddered at the thought.

"On the other hand, from her perspective, she may have refused because she had sensed that she would not have her way with me. I mentioned that I had boundaries and lines that I would not cross. I told her

that I planned to live with my parents and that I wanted to live an Islamic lifestyle. Most women especially do not like the living with in laws part." Jaffar Chacha shook his head before continuing.

"I recently came across a lovely verse in the Holy Quran which states that when we have a problem or sustain losses then there is perhaps some good that comes out of it. There was lots of good that came out of this failed proposal of mine. It had a huge impact on my life. I will give you the details later. Remember, just this small incident changed the course of my life. For now, all these little incidents were moulding me and directing me towards my destiny. It was Allah's way of guiding me." He paused and looked at each of us before carrying on.

"Not much time passed at all before my mother arranged yet another proposal. This time, it was my brother's neighbour. And let me tell you everything went sideways right from the get-go." He groaned covering his face as he recalled this particular episode. "I was dressed in complimentary shades of blue and one of my brother's lent me his chocolate brown jacket. Without thinking, I wore it. I am pretty sure that I looked a sight in my mismatched clothes, but then again, I don't think it mattered much to the people I went to see. They were simple people living in a small town. Anyway, we got there and I parked as far away from my brother's flat thinking that the prospective

bride that I was going to see lived in the flat next to his. I was feeling a little nervous after all the negative responses along my *samoosa* run. I needed a smoke to calm my nerves. Smokers, you know how it is, any excuse for a smoke. I got into the miserable habit because of the company I joined which is another whole story.

I told my parents to go ahead to my brother's place and I would join them shortly. I pulled out my cigarette and lit up on the far side of the yard alongside another house. While sitting there and puffing on my cigarette, I had this nagging feeling that someone was watching me and although I looked all around and even at the house I stood beside, I saw no one and heard no one. This intensely strong, nagging feeling that I was being watched just would not go away. I finally squinched off my unsatisfying cigarette half way through, and guess what... I put the *stompie* (half cigarette) into my pocket."

We all burst into laughter and Abdullah said, "Maybe whoever was watching you marvelled at how thrifty you were!" And we laughed even harder. "I hope you did not dig your nose or anything else while you were there."

It took him a while to recover and amidst his laughter he went on: "Boy! now you're making me worry even

more. What if I did do something like that?" He held his head as if giving up and this made us laugh even more.

When we regained composure he continued, "The sixth sense that I mentioned before, it is a part of our spiritual nature and it really works. I told you, us humans have immense potential and this is just one such example."

"So someone was really watching you? Who was it?" I couldn't contain my curiosity.

He chuckled at my impatience and said, "After those strange feelings of being watched, I went to my brother's place and a short while later we went to meet his neighbours, our prospective bride. I don't know how to explain what went through my mind as we headed towards the house on the far side. The one I had stood outside while smoking."

We all exclaimed simultaneously!

"My gosh!" My father said.

"So someone WAS watching you!" I said at the same time.

Abdullah was beside himself laughing at the poor, eager, hopeful, groom-to-be.

"All I can say is, it was frightening to think that someone had been observing and scrutinizing me at a time when I had thought I was alone. And, not just casual scrutiny, but scrutiny to see if I would be good enough to marry

their daughter or sister. It also got me thinking that my Creator is watching me at all times and He even knows all my inner thoughts. If for just five minutes of my life I was so worried then how much more worried will I be on the Day when I am to finally face my Creator, Who knows every single detail of me. Terrifying!"

"Ah! The Day of Reckoning, the Day of Account." My father sighed.

"O Allah, forgive us and do not expose our wrong thoughts and actions for I know You to be most Merciful and most tolerant. And O Allah! please make this time of Reckoning easy on us or better still, please do not hold us to account."

"Ameen!" We all chorused.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "When I walked into the house I scanned everyone to get a clue as to whether they had seen me. No one gave the game up and I felt a little better. I wonder what I would have done if someone smirked or laughed."

"Whew, Jaffar Chacha! Close call!" Abdullah said. We all felt relieved that he hadn't been embarrassed.

"The prospective bride never looked at me, never ventured to say much except for the occasional "yes" or "hmmm....". I showed her my false teeth and laid my cards down. 'I am going to live with my parents and I don't want you to have a problem with them.' I went on

to even say that whether you are right or wrong it does not matter; you will be wrong to me if you have problems with my parents."

Abdullah and I looked at him incredulously.

"Did you really show her your false teeth?" I couldn't help myself. I don't know if that was incredibly brave or stupid. And all the things he said to her... on their first meeting! What guts!

"Are you serious Jaffar Chacha." my brother laughingly said: "If I was that girl, I would have run very far, very fast."

Jaffar chacha laughed heartily at our responses and said: "I think you are right son. I don't think that I would have accepted such a proposal myself.

Well, that is the thing about arranged marriages, there is no time for sweet talk" he went on: "Honestly speaking I was not too impressed with her at this point either. She was behaving like a zombie. It did not cross my mind that perhaps she was being coy and reserved out of modesty which is then a very prized character trait. I learnt much later that the Holy Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him, has said that a woman can be married for four reasons: beauty, wealth, nobility and piety. He recommended that we choose a wife that is pious."

My father exclaimed ecstatically: "Beautiful! Beautiful! Such great wisdom. The outer beauty could never come anywhere near the inner beauty. What's the point of having a beautiful wife, or loads of money if she nags, fights and refuses to compromise."

Jaffar Chacha raised up his hands and said: "*Wah*, Gulam Bhai, *wah!* Lovely insight."

A silence fell over the group as we were all lost in our own thoughts.

Abdullah finally broke the silence, "So Jaffar Chacha, what was the outcome of the unfortunate meeting?"

Jaffar Chacha held up his hand to indicate to Abdullah to be patient and continued, "I was fortunate in this way. I was pushed by circumstances along this path to find a wife that would please my parents and such a wife, I now know is a wife of piety. Maybe it was not circumstances but Allah's way of guiding me."

While Jaffar Chacha spoke, I was thinking about the things he had said about piety. I know most people would think that a pious person is one who prays a lot or someone that talks about religion but he is linking other character traits to piety. This was all very interesting and thought provoking.

Jaffar Chacha went on: "After our visit we got back to my brother's flat. My sister immediately asked me about how I felt. I did not want to marry her but I simply could

not bring myself to say this. I did not want this prospective bride to feel like the way I had felt when I was turned down by the other girl. Now, THIS is the greatest lesson that I learnt from that failed proposal. I learnt that I must not to hurt anyone's feelings. I could not say 'no' simply because I did not want her to feel like the way I felt when I was turned down. I did not know it then, but this is one of the most important part of our religion; do not hurt anyone's heart. So I told my sister that it is a huge decision to make and I needed to see her a few more times before I could make up my mind. I needed to buy time to figure a way out of this proposal without hurting her feelings. I was hoping that she would do me the favour by dropping me or getting cold feet... no such luck! I had to visit her again!"

"Wow, Jaffar Chacha" my brother said "Don't tell me that you ended up marrying this young women that you did not even like. Gosh!"

"Maybe, maybe not", he said: "you will just have to wait and see. On one such visit I thought that I would take her out to the beach. I wanted to live out the movie part and be a bit romantic. So when I asked her parents' permission to do this, her father consented but sent her sister and husband along with their children. That's like sending a whole army to protect his little baby. My whole plan off being alone with her in a scenic surrounding like a movie set, backfired. They never left us alone. Imagine that! I was upset but I am glad they

did this because it is the proper way. We were not married and we did not have the right to privacy. As a man it's easy to move on after a break up but for a woman it is far more difficult, so my father in law was protecting his daughter's interest. I did not know it then, but this is good parental upbringing.

I was living far off so I couldn't visit very often. I used to phone her once a week but I could only talk to her for five or, maximum ten minutes and it made me wonder how other courting couples could spend hours on the phone. This went on for a few months until my sister asked me when they could set the wedding date."

We gasped in unison! So she was the one... or was she?

"I know that my sister had not forgotten what I had said but, like me, she too was trapped in into getting a positive response from me and she had cleverly worded it to give her the maximum force to push me over the cliff.

What was I to say at this point... Things were out of my control so I said 'as soon as possible.' If I was going over the cliff then I might as well get it over with as soon as possible.

So you see, mine was not just an arranged marriage but I was getting married to someone that I did not even really like. It's not that she was unattractive. I just think that by this point in my life I had moved on past looking

for a wife by their physical attributes. It's wrong to allowed skin colour or shape to influence any of my relationships. At that point I just wanted someone that I could get along with and even that was not present.

With time, I have come to realise that the most important thing to look for is sincerity. Someone who wants to do what is right, someone who is prepared to sacrifice their comfort should the need arise, someone who can accept their flaws and work on them. The problem though, is that these qualities are not seen easily. These are qualities that come to light after interacting over a long period of time.

Although I had not realised it then, it was my Creator guiding this whole affair after I prayed to him to guide me. I was married seven months after my mother's search for my bride had begun."

"Wow Jaffar Chacha" my brother said; "That's really pushing your luck. You were not attracted to her and you did not know if she would get along with your mum. I was wondering about this pious part. Was she really a pious wife and everything worked out smoothly."

He laughed and said: "I don't think of this as pushing my luck because I was not in control of the way things were going but I was just going with the flow. As for her being pious, I now very strongly think so but life is not easy, there are trials along every step of the way and God's

wisdom behind these trials is so that He could bring out the very best in us. These trials afford us the opportunity to become the enlightened beings that He created us to be. I told you how the one girl's refusal shaped my thinking and had a huge bearing on the eventual outcome of who I ended up marrying."

"Gosh, life is hectic." I said: "Jaffar Chacha, are you saying that you still had problems into you marriage."

Jaffar Chacha laughed again and said: "if you think, that all that I talked about so far as being problems, then I just don't know what you will say if you hear the rest of my story."

"Jaffar Chacha, please continue, I am eager to hear more."

Doolhun; The Bride

"Do you suppose that you would enter Paradise while Allah has not yet distinguished those of you who strive hard (in the cause of Allah) and has not yet distinguished the patiently persevering."

Al Quran 3:142

Chapter 5

"Life is like a wave or a cycle of opposites - light and darkness, hunger and satiety and so forth. I like this one: Until you do not get to the bottom of the trough you will never get to climb the crest of the wave and the deeper the trough the higher the crest. As an example; If there is any time in my life, that I enjoy food, then it is at the time of *Ifthar*, *the time of sunset when a Muslim breaks his day long fast* during the month of *Ramadaan* (*9th month of the Islamic calendar*). I sometimes shed tears of joy because everything simply tastes just so divine. It's the same food and water that I eat and drink every other day of my life but it tastes so much better because I am hungry and thirsty. Being hungry is being at the bottom of the trough and breaking fast is being at the crest of the wave."

"So true, Jaffar Bhai! *Khabi khushi, khabi Gham!*" (*sometimes happy, sometimes sad*) My father looked like he wanted to sing another Bollywood number but quickly gave up on the notion.

"Trust me, destiny forcing my hand in marriage was not the bottom of the trough. I still had much further to fall."

"What?" I asked incredulously, "It actually gets worse?"

"Yes unfortunately, no matter how bad a situation, it can always be worse. I found that out for myself. The first six months of our marriage was quite pleasant. No fireworks but no hiccups either. I was a teacher posted a long way from home so it was like a honeymoon, just the two of us living in a cosy outbuilding surrounded by wonderful families. Every weekend we would be invited to one of their homes for supper. I had lived by myself in this same place for six months prior to getting married and no one had ever really bothered to invite me. As soon as my wife came along, so too, did the invites.

I suppose she was a better people's person than I ever was and she still out does me by leaps and bounds in that department. To think, I thought I was the talkative one. Or maybe, this is just one of the blessings of being married. From the onset, my Doolhun was very hard working and polite. She never got angry or used vulgar language. She never argued. She was almost perfect. I wish I could say the same for me. The one thing good about me though, was that my vices were somewhat moderate." He paused, deep in thought.

"In any relationship there has to be common interests, something to talk about. As I already said, I could hardly talk to my Doolhun for more than ten minutes. I tried hard to figure out her interests and I, wanting to grow our relationship, would try all sorts of topics to build a conversation so that we could have something to talk about. Everything from art, to spirituality but no luck. She would talk but not much. Depending on how you look at it, talking less can be a good quality. She never showed an interest in my job either by asking me questions about it. I on the other hand, loved to talk about things so that I could learn more. I loved watching movies in those days but my Doolhun would fall asleep within five minutes of a movie with her mouth wide open." An involuntary chuckle escaped him at the memory. "All this was no problem to me but it would have been nice for us to have a few common interests so that we could spend more time together. I know that getting to know someone and developing a relationship takes years.

We had one thing in common for now. I loved being out in nature and so did my Doolhun, so we spent most of my days off touring nature in all its splendour. Ah, the lovely pools formed along the lazy Klip river, shaded by tall willows. In nature I saw a bit of Allah's beauty in flowers. The colours, patterns - Uniform, abstract; complimentary, contrasting - it's all there. I still wonder just how many shades of green there are in nature. I felt a bit of Allah's power in the form of lightning, winds and

storms, a thing we cannot see and barely feel, wind, has the power of dropping buildings. His craft is amazing, His knowledge and wisdom that is imbued in everything is truly unimaginable, *SubhanAllah (praise be to our Creator)*.

For me to get knocked by a car in front of my house is quite probable but for me to get knocked while I am wearing a blue shirt is far less probable and for me to get knocked on a Monday while I am wearing my blue shirt, in front of my house is almost impossible. With every condition I add the probability of it happening becomes exponentially unlikely.

To me, when I consider all the probabilities that has to be fulfilled for life to exist on our planet, such as the sun being present and at just the right distance, our planet having water and oxygen in an exact ratio and so many, many more criteria to be met for life to exist then I have no option but to accept that our universe is not by chance but it is definitely created by a Supreme, Perfect, All-knowing Being, one hundred percent. The reason I talk about Allah (our Creator), and sometimes my Spiritual Guide, is that they have had a huge bearing in my life and our marriage. To me Allah, and all my daily life activities, are not separate issues, because religion influences everything I do. For you to appreciate and enjoy my story I have to tell you about these underlying factors that have a huge impact on our lives."

Jaffar Chacha's soft expression as he recalled his early marriage turned serious as he continued, "Now that I think about our six months honeymoon I would say that it was perfect but back then I did not think much of it. What a fool I was, but then again, life's not just about good times but more importantly it is about developing ourselves to the fullest of our potential; not just physically or mentally but also spiritually.

After being through so much of life I can now say why I did not feel my life perfect then. What we want is almost always what is being marketed to us by western media which is all about fulfilling our worldly desires. We want to be like the heroes and heroines of a Hollywood blockbuster. Plan out our lives down to the minutest of details according to what's marketed to us and strive for these shallow goals all our lives.

My Doolhun was nothing like the images of the women stuck in my mind and my life was nothing like what I saw in movies. I watched too many movies and maybe I was expecting our lives to turn out like a fairy tale. The reality of it is this: How was my Doolhun, a real person, to compete with a filtered, unnaturally perfect image on a movie screen, or how was she to play the role of a movie star that's stuck in my mind.

This is one of the challenges of our modern times, we are trying to live life like the way it is portrayed in the movies and when we fail to achieve this, then we are

not happy. My life, at this point was perfect but I could not appreciate this because I was unknowingly expecting and trying to find something else."

Jaffar Chacha reminded me of an incident that my father related to me. In their young days they watched the movie Tarzan and when they got back home, one of the boys re-enacted a scene, he banged his chest and hollered out as Tarzan had. He then jumped off the top of the staircase and ended up breaking his leg. I found it so difficult to believe but when I considered my obsession with karate after watching 'Enter the Dragon', I realised how plausible it was. Jaffar Chacha's words made me realise that movies also unconsciously influence us in many other subtle ways as well. It's disconcerting to say the least... being influenced unconsciously. I recall reading something about subliminal stimulation which is what he is referring to.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "The next six months was just as good as the first. I was transferred back to my hometown so we were living in the same house as my parents and two older brothers with their families. It was a big house and we were quite comfortable initially. My bride was really hard working and she got on perfectly well with the rest of my family. On that note, I want to add that movies influence another aspect of our lives too.

The life depicted by western media becomes the norm, the standard and we all try to keep up with it. We are influenced to live separately in our own fairy-tale like home so that we can eat and behave as we please. We can design and setup the house as we please. It does not promote the kind of life we were living.

When living with others, one cannot have their own ways and do and eat as they please. I remember, buying a sewing machine and keeping it in the dining room until I made space. My mom nagged me until I moved it into our bedroom. And thus, I learnt to be neater in the communal areas of our home. If I had a choice, I would eat red meat everyday and get really ill. Instead of focusing on growing myself spiritually I would be absorbed in choosing curtains and wall paper. I would definitely be a lot more selfish and this goes against Islamic teachings."

I was thinking that Jaffar Chacha was hitting the nail on the head. I already had an idea of the type of woman I wanted to marry and the house we would live in, all influenced by western media.

Jaffar Chacha went on: "In reality, the positive aspects of living together with an extended family far outweigh the negatives. It is much safer especially in this day and age when crime is rampant. I have complete peace of mind knowing my Doolhun and our children are safe. That's how I can be here tonight with you all so relaxed

and carefree. Living together, our joys are magnified and are our struggles and sadness shared. We have always lent each other support through everything. It's also much more economical and environmentally friendlier too.

Want to give an example of how setting up one's own home can eventually lead to loneliness. My one neighbour is now 80 years old and he lives in this huge house all by himself for the past 30 years. He was a teacher and when he was young he and his wife set up their own home. He had 2 sons and each child had their own bedroom. He strived hard for his family and even set up the outbuilding into a study area with each of his children having their own space. He pushed them to study and they ended up being highly qualified people. They too pursued their careers and set up their own homes, one in a far off city and the other in another country. He now lives alone. If he is ill, he has to take care of himself. Once he fell out in the garden and fortunately his neighbour helped him. May Allah help him, but if he is inside his house or he gets very sick inside his house then he has to take care of himself or call for help using his phone."

I was thinking that there are actually lots of people in this kind of situation. Why just yesterday I was talking to someone that knew my dad and after chatting a while I asked him where he lived. He told me that he used to live close to us but he and his wife decided to sell up

their house and move into a small flat because their children have moved on to set up their own homes. Sooner or later one has to pass on and the other is going to be left alone.

My dad said: "Jaffar bhai I knew this one lady who lived alone. The neighbours only discovered that she had died a few days later because of the smell and that too, she lived in a flat with neighbours all around."

"Allah! Allah" Jaffar Chacha exclaimed: "So sad but this is the outcome of the way we live our lives today, we pursue a materialistic way of life and there comes a time when we realise that it was all so futile. It seems like the western influence is out to destroy the family unit by dividing us."

Jaffar chacha paused and it seemed like eternity to me as the thought of all the lonely people filled my mind. He went on: "At that point of my life I did not think about all this. I just wanted to be there for my parents and I felt that there is so much more to life than striving to build a house. I was searching for answers for a whole lot of things. Questions that always popped up in my mind was: why am I here on earth? What am I supposed to do?"

I came to the realisation that some things are just a means to an end. They are therefore, not as important as the end goal. As an example, working is just the

means to obtain food and shelter. Food and shelter is what is important and working is just the means. Then another question popped into my mind: how much effort should be put into making a shelter? As a government worker, I had access to housing subsidiary but if I took it, it came with a rope around my neck. I must admit that I was tempted to buy a house of my own but I also knew that my parents were getting old and it would be nice if we lived with them so that we could assist them in their old age and offer them companionship. My parents never asked us to stay but I knew that this is what would make them happy. I managed to overcome the urge to buy my own house and instead I opted to just continue living with my parents.

Most importantly, in living together, there were more people in our lives to grow to love. Media mentally grooms us only to love our spouses and children but in living together there is that opportunity to grow to love parents and siblings even more. To me, love is the greatest thing we could achieve in life. So why limit it! The more people we love, the more successful we are. This makes so much sense, the more people we love the better it is!" We all sat quietly stewing over what Jaffar Chacha has just said. He had definitely given us a lot to think about and consider.

After a brief pause he went on, "I really think highly of the relationship one of my cousins, slightly older than

me, had with my dad. They went fishing together, they watched soccer together, they laughed, joked and even smoked cigarettes together. I wish I could have had that kind of relationship with my father." He paused to sip on his water then continued.

"Ah, back to my Doolhun, a special memory comes to mind, perhaps the best of this period of our lives together, I went on a weekend away with the extended family. Unfortunately, my Doolhun stayed back because she was in the final term of pregnancy. I was out for only two days but I had missed her. When our gazes collided upon my return home, there was a tiny flash of lightning. Maybe it was because of this tiny bit of overindulgence that we had to suffer what came next."

I groaned inwardly. Jaffar Chacha was talking about love and now when he gets a bit of it, he calls it overindulgence! It seems like he read my mind because he went on to give details:

"Just as we cannot fit two swords into one sheath, we cannot love two people simultaneously in the same highest degree. Our principal love can only be one and I very strongly know that it should be our Creator first, our parents next and then our spouse, children and so forth. I must be able to care for all children like the way I cared for mine. To me this is the recipe for all round success because it amounts to caring and building relationships all round instead of just focusing on a

single or a few relationship. I realised the importance of my Creator at a very early age, the time when I was in the gutter. Allah, is for all times closer to us than anyone else. No matter where we are, or what we are doing, He is always present and He is ever-ready to listen to us and help us, provided its in the right direction. So when He helped me out of the gutter I wanted to know Him better. I searched for ways to do this. As I have said, I spent many long hours alone in nature pondering over life and I knew for certain that Allah exists, but just how do I get to meet Him and know Him.

My first step towards knowing Allah was the prayer of Surah Al Fatiha, the first chapter of the Holy Quran, a prayer for guidance which also teaches that this guidance is attained by following Allah's Chosen ones. For now, Allah had linked me with a Spiritual Guide at seventeen. I had just gotten out of the gutter. So, my Spiritual Guide, who I took as God's agent, was the one I put into my number one spot in terms of love. Even this was a very calculated move and I will try to explain later, Insha-Allah, *Allah willing!*"

Jaffar Chacha talking about faith reminded me of what my dad had said about faith. He said that faith is the thing that grants you paradise and success in the hereafter and faith is about believing in Allah, experiencing Allah and even knowing Allah. He went on to say that, believing in Allah must not be lip service. It must be implemented in everything we do such as

having modesty, not being materialistic, loving and serving others and so forth.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "Around a year into my marriage, I got the opportunity to spend some quality time with my Spritual Guide to learn about spirituality. However the amount of time I spent working was not leaving much time for me to spend with him and I needed to change this.

Giving up a secure, well-paid job and not having a back-up plan is very difficult to do and this is where the problems in our marriage started. How ironic, my main reason to become a teacher was the holidays and the seemingly shorter working hours. The reality is that teachers work very long hours and it's very stressful. They have to prepare their lessons the night before and although I would spend four to five hours extra preparing each night, I still felt it inadequate. In total I was spending about twelve hours a day working, leaving me time for nothing else.

It's not that I was lazy to work. Oh no, On the contrary, whenever I worked I gave off my very best and even this I felt, was not enough. To me, being apathetic, lazy or shirking my job amounted to cheating, lying or stealing. Even if my employer was not watching I would still work hard. However, I strongly felt that there was more to life than just working so as to earn. I was prepared to earn less so that I did not have to work as much.

In terms of how I would cope with earning less was easy to me. I was going to cut down on my expenses and do without unnecessary things. I knew that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that half your expenses can be met by being less extravagant. This made perfect sense to me. I'd rather have the free time to pursue spirituality than material possessions."

I was thinking that what Jaffar Chacha was saying is very important: work hard even if no one is looking. This is being honest. Today our country, South Africa, is falling apart because of apathy. Government workers want to get paid but they just do not work diligently. Blue chip companies are falling apart because of apathy and dishonesty.

As for working fewer hours and taking a cut in wages, sounds fair to me. My friend once said that, if at death's door, the angel of death has to offer you half a hour of extra life for the billion dollars that you have saved, what will you do? I had to admit that even if it was ten times more money I would go for the deal and this made me realise how valuable my time is. So I agree totally with what Jaffar Chacha was trying to do.

Meanwhile Jaffar Chacha's story continued: "I loved doing things for others, or serving my community, but somehow or the other, this so called noble profession of teaching was not fitting into this category. I felt the

teaching syllabus to be inadequate- too career and grade orientated and severely lacking in truly inspiring children to search and enquire and to figure out what life was all about. All our syllabus focused on was careers and money. I was not interested in the money and I was not getting any job satisfaction so the best thing for me to do was to move on.

After quitting my job as a teacher, I tried starting my own business but no matter what I tried, I failed. Just like teaching, everything looked easy from the outside. The reality was far from easy. We were surviving... just barely. I knew that at some point things would come right and I was prepared to try till this happened.

My bride, on the other hand, was a bit uneasy with all the financial stress and she decided that she wanted to work. I was against this. To me, her taking care of the children and the home was far more important than working. To me, both a husband and wife working affects poverty. Some families would end up with two jobs, both husband and wife, while others would end up with no jobs. It just contributes to making life on earth a rat race for all."

Jaffar Chacha, talking about this, reminded me of an incident that took place just yesterday. I was at the bank with my father and the conversation with the assistant, was about how difficult it was to make ends meet and she was saying that she and her husband worked so that

they could give their children the best. My father is somewhat like Jaffar Chacha, and he commented: but you being with your children instead of working is giving them the best. The woman looked up at him in surprise, her mouth dropped and she said that she had never looked at it that way. My dad went on to say: To a child, money, stuff and fancy schools cannot compare to just being with parents that love them.

Later, on our way home he continued discussing it. He said to me that there are plenty ways of making ends meet. He said: The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that even if a person has two valleys full of gold he would still long for a third.

My father said that there was great wisdom in not having too much because it leads to so much good such as contentment, learning to control our passions, not stressing our environment but living in tune with it and also living in harmony with others in that you are not trying to take everything for yourself but you are giving others an opportunity to earn.

This really struck me, from just one thing a person is attaining peace with himself, learning to control his carnal desires, the environment and even helping others. *Subhanallah, praise be to Allah!* Both he and Jaffar Chacha made a lot of sense.

Jaffar Chacha went on: "No matter how hard I tried explaining all of this, she would not listen. When she told me that she had found a job in a factory, I was forced to find a solution that worked for both of us. I instead got her a job with my brother, working from home. It was not exactly what I wanted but it solved my problem in a way that suited not just me but, more importantly, the needs of our children and the dictates of my religion. Having tried and failed at getting my own business going, I also ended up working for my brother as a plumber.

Seriously, you would laugh if I told you about the things I did in business but that's a story for another day. In short, with my kind of attitude to money, business was definitely not for me. Working for my brother wasn't too bad but I was still restricted and did not have the luxury to do completely as I pleased.

I was searching for Allah but I never realised that in every aspect of my life, no matter how small, or how difficult, everything was linked to my search. In achieving success in anything in life, be it children, be it getting a house or a career; there is hard work involved, sacrifices to be made and sometimes tears to be shed. So too, it was with my search for Allah.

Quitting my job, as you would see, was the start of a whole string of problems with my bride, but most importantly, the solutions, are what really matters.

Before I continue, I need to tell you why I feel it important to share all of this with you, why I sometimes say things that make me or my Doolhun look good or bad... Don't interpret it as bragging about myself or gossiping about my Doolhun. Islam is a very balanced religion. As much as it abhors and discourages materialism, it holds the wealthy person that spends on others in a very high light, the third highest rank. As much as it teaches one to pray and give charity in secret, it also encourages one to do these things publicly. The point is that wealth, prayer, fasting, charity are not the only important things but our intentions and our outlook to life is what matters most and we need to learn how to analyse ourselves to see our true intentions behind our actions.

This leads to self-realization. This is very difficult to do, impossible without the help and guidance from Allah through His Messengers. So my story is not about bragging about myself or us, it's not about gossiping and exposing the faults of my bride or myself but it is about analysing the problems we face in life and the kind of solutions that work. I always pray that my intentions are good and that my life experiences can help people, especially y'all, the youth, to have better relationships and achieve more out of life.

Doolhun, The Bride

By using the words freedom and democracy, humanity is being deceptively estranged from our Creator's laws and we are instead being lured to being trapped by the greed of our carnal desires, chasing this fleeting world, giving into temptation. From the path of true freedom we end up slaves to worldly chattels.

Chapter 6

“Despite all these conflicts, my married life continued.” Jaffar Chacha went on “We were blessed with our second child but our differences, when it came to financial matters and how it affected our lives continued to grow. Now that my Doolhun earned, she needed to spend. She wanted to open a clothing store account which I was dead against. I tried explaining to her that it is best to live according to what we have than to buy on credit.

I tried to explain to her that credit is like putting a rope around one's necks that gradually tightens. It encourages one to buy more easily because it is so easy to take without having to pay immediately. This is why a credit card is given more value than a debit card. The corporate powers know how to exploit human nature. They are well aware that we will buy more recklessly because of credit. They are well aware that we will soon

be indebted to them and they will thus make more money out of us by way of interest."

"It's a trap!" My father said. "I agree! Goolam Bhai, It is a trap!" Jaffar Chacha nodded in agreement and continued.

"I was adamant and, although she brought up this issue a few times, I was not prepared to budge on this issue of credit. One day a person from the store calls me and says: 'Your wife is here and she wants to open up an account with us and we need your permission'. I cupped the phone with my hand and after venting my anger calmly replied: okay!"

With shoulders drooping and in a quiet voice Jaffar chacha said: "What else could I do? I am someone that hates to force my way onto someone else, even my wife and children, yet marriage and family requires us to work as one, to be one, to be a team. She was doing things on her own, not as a team."

"Jaffar Chacha," Abdullah said in a comforting tone: "Your Doolhun did a few things you did not approve off but she was still a very hard working person and she gave you a lot by living peacefully with your parents and other family members. I just wonder what you would have done if you married a dragon... or rather, a bride of our times!" We all burst out laughing.

Amidst our laughter Jaffar Chacha smilingly put out his hands and said: "Cool it boys! Materialism is a problem we all face. This is what our carnal desires pushes us towards. As I said earlier, even I was influenced by the media to want certain things although I had better. Perhaps my Doolhun too just had these urges to follow the going trends in society. We all make these mistakes and we cannot judge anyone else, even the brides of today, but we should rather look at our faults and try to put them right."

"Jee chacha" Abdullah said sheepishly; "Sorry if my joke went out of hand."

"No problem." Jaffar chacha said and continued: "I wish I could have appreciated her good and overlooked her flaws," Jaffar chacha continued, "but life is strange. No matter which path we take, one thing leads to another. Look at a wealthy man, he still works hard and invests and reinvests although he has so much that he and even his grandchildren can retire comfortably. This just does not make sense? There is no way to justify this. Its pure greed or stupidity; a slave to worldly goods.

So, for my Doolhun it went from opening one account to another and another. Sorry... from working, it led to all of this and so much more. As much as I did not want to make an issue out of all of this it was simply going that way. The up side, she also bought me and the children some lovely clothing, she bought a bunk bed,

did the room up- all against my wishes. She bought the tiles and I ended up wasting my time fixing them to the floor. But I must admit, I enjoyed it. I like using my hands to do something different.”

In contrast, the bulk of my earnings went towards primarily paying for food, shelter, medical and utility bills. These are things we simply cannot do without. Yes I would try to take the cheapest way out but at the end of the day we had a roof over our heads and food to eat. I also felt it important that we should visit her parents and siblings and I managed to achieve this too on a regular basis. They lived far off and I could not do this as often as I would have liked. Here too, I did not take her in a fancy car either but I got her there. Next up was clothing and even here I would do the bare necessities. Lastly I spent a bit on entertainment as cheaply as possible.

To me, this was the most practical, cost effective and the least stressful way to live life. Our religion teaches us to live simple lives, this is the way that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, lived his life and to me this is the way to peace and happiness. Controlling our worldly desires is the only way to learn contentment leading up to eventual peace. It's the only way to true freedom.

As you all know by now, my Doolhun had some really excellent qualities. It was just this one aspect that was a

problem to me. She was going down a materialistic path with the money she earned. Although she spent her money so far on the family as a whole, it was not for basic necessities but more for the extras, the luxuries. I think she just wanted to be like everyone else around us and maybe I was just too hard when it comes to living simply. I tried to be flexible and I gave in to some of her demands but the thing about materialism is that it never results in contentment. There is always more and more that one would want.”

Jaffar chacha was reminding me of something my dad said recently. He said, everyone, from a low paid earner to a high earner, would desire an increase and if you had to give someone the salary that he thinks would be perfect to take care of all his desires then it would be just a matter of time before he would desire more because his standard of living would have changed.

Jaffar chacha was saying: “Next, she wanted to buy a TV for the bedroom. I contended that we have a TV in the lounge and I told her that when I come into the bedroom, I want to sleep and the TV is just going to upset the whole apple cart. Apart from this, the TV being in the lounge forced us to be restricted in what we watched and how much we watched because others in our home also watched TV. A TV in the bedroom is so much harder to control. My protests were like dust in a storm and within a few days a TV found its place at the foot of our bed. I let this slide too and I must admit, I

think I enjoyed the TV more than her... Mike Hammer was running then.”

Jaffar chacha was admirably patient given the circumstances. I wonder what I would have done if my wife had to do this to me. Not only did he take it in his stride but he seemed to be enjoying the TV. I suppose his objection was not about the TV being a source of entertainment but it was for other reasons. I just cannot come up with a solution as to how I would handle such a situation. Really tough one!

Jaffar Chacha went on: “Regarding my special interest, it was going well. I spent two years, every night with my Spiritual Guide, the best years of my life. This interaction brought me really close to him and he taught me a lot. He taught me the art of writing in just a few words. Although I had qualified as a teacher, my writing skills were pathetic. All he did was to advise me not to publish my first five books. I had never thought or dreamt of writing at this stage in my life and here he was talking about publishing.

So it was just by writing and writing that I learnt to write. He gave us so much information that there was no shortage of material as to what to write about either. At least I can tell you how he taught me to write. Other things remain a mystery to me. It is only now, decades later, when I reflect on our interactions, am I able to piece together just how he inspired me. If it took

him one minute to motivate me to become a writer, can you imagine how much he taught me in the span of two years? I wonder if I will ever be able to unpack it all.

No matter how much I know, it means nothing to me, in the sense of achievement, because all knowledge stems from our Creator and ultimately belongs to Him and all praises belong to Him only. If there was ever a moment when I felt special or proud, my Spiritual Guide cut me down to size with just one look or a cold shoulder. Now THAT really hurts and that was all it took for me to realise I had overstepped. I learnt to be a fairly well balanced person without pride. I pray that my Lord keeps me this way because pride is the worst sin and it is so easy to fall victim to it. In our religion it is self-worship, a serious sin.

With time, I analysed myself, my behaviour and my thought process and so everything I say about myself comes from a place of understanding myself and not pride. Well, I pray and hope so.

To me, the foundation is important, especially in marriage, because it affects a lot of people. A home is where minds are shaped, where important lessons are taught and learnt. Families are the building blocks of society. If we can get this right, all else will fall into place. Like any social structure, to function smoothly and progress, there simply has to be a leader who has the final say. There is no other way. My religion teaches

that the husband is the head of the house. This solves the TV problem, the credit problem or any other problem. BUT, so far, she will not tow the line.

I always wondered why our Creator, the All-knowing made the man head of the household over the woman. He knows us better than even we know ourselves. He is our Creator after all. It's not that I question His laws, it's just that I know that there is deep wisdom behind everything He teaches and knowing this leads to enlightenment.

So this made me do a lot of pondering on this point. Before I share some of this information with you I need to tell you a little more about myself. I am a very sensitive, caring person and I have learnt this about myself on quite a few occasions when I would sacrifice my comforts for others, sometimes for people I barely knew. So it's not out of ego and self-interest that I wanted to be the head of my family but it was because of what my religion taught me. It's not that I had my own way either and did things to suite me. O no, I was following my religion, I was following a model way of living so as to eventually derive the best out of life for not just myself but my entire family. Mind you, I was also attracted to attaining the fineries of what this world had to offer but I was controlling myself.

So my theory; We all know that men are fuelled by a hormone called testosterone and women, estrogen.

Men have a consistent dose of their hormone, making them emotionally stable thus, better suited to making important decisions. A woman's hormone on the other hand fluctuates according to her menstrual cycle, which at times makes her moody and irrational. The same woman can go from flying extremely high emotionally to being down in the dumps within a short space of time. Both the male and female biological make up are special in their own way and have their own advantages and disadvantages. Men are more rational while women are compassionate and creative. The highs women experience must be really high, far higher than what men could ever experience."

So if a husband and wife are to plan a house, most men would think of cost, durability and functionality while most women would think of the fancy trims, colours, lighting and the look of everything. Though in today's times, with society focusing on materialism, more and more men are also being groomed to be like women in terms of striving for things to impress others. Living to impress others, this is another trap.

If you walk into a haberdashery store with all the frills, the collage of colour and the intricate patterns then you will understand what I mean. This is a women's store. While the boring, yet necessary hardware store is more a man's haunt.

So in His infinite wisdom, our Creator has made the man the head of the household.

It sounds so good, just and wholesome, when people say that a husband and wife should consult each other and make decisions together but this democracy just does not work in a marriage because there will come that time when the husband and wife would not be able to agree.

What happens when a man and his wife clash when making a decision and no one wants to budge? This is where we were at this point. She wanted a certain lifestyle that I just did not want and there was no way that we both could get what we wanted without robbing the other. Take the TV as an example. She wanted a TV in our bedroom and I did not and our discussing it to find a solution failed. So to me, only one being the head of a house makes perfect sense provided that he leads according to a code of conduct as directed by our Creator. In our case, we are Muslims and I wanted to live an Islamic life.”

Jaffar Chacha’s story was bringing out so many different thoughts in me. I never in my wildest dreams thought that religion pertains to everything we do in life and that it has such comprehensive teachings for everything in life. These laws of marriage, to me, is a constitution or a blue print on how to make a marriage work. We have such laws for everything else, why not a marriage

too. I also read up in the Holy Quran that the tie of marriage lies in the husband hands. He has the final say in a divorce.

From whatever I learnt in Madressa (Islamic school) I got the impression that religion is just about prayer or reading the Holy Quran.

This bit about the husband being the head of the family makes complete sense. It's practical and it's a solution to making our marriages work. Amazing! Unfortunately we live in such a messed up society where everyone wants to do what they want. No wonder divorce is spiralling out of control.

All these thoughts were making me feel that we today, with our secular education, science and freedom to do as we please is not advanced. Jaffar Chacha's story was making me feel like we are trapped in a rut. Our secular education is taking us backwards instead of forward.

I was also thinking about his description of how the sexes tick. I feel that the modern western culture is having an impact in shaping the outlook and roles that men and women play. I think it's grooming them to be more general by pushing an agenda of equal rights. Recently I read an article where they are even trying to use general words so as to remove the sex of a person. It's silly because there will always be differences between the sexes such as the ability to have children

and women not being able to take part in the sporting event with men on one platform.

While these thoughts were running through my mind, Jaffar Chacha was saying “In considering the different desires of men and women, then it’s perhaps only normal that husbands and wives be at odds and this rule of the husband being the head is solving the problem.

Surely God’s guidelines are perfect because He created us and knows us best. I tried explaining and discussing these things with her but my bride just could not see this. She was still making more and more demands as you would see. How, just how, are we to solve our problems? How are we to attain peace and happiness under such conflicts?

Doolhun, The Bride.

The highest rank in the sight of Allah are those who love others although they have no bonds of kinship with them but love them for the sake of their Creator and the devil loves those most who sow discord between people especially between a husband and wife. From the teachings of Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Chapter 7

My stomach was in knots from listening to all this talk of conflicts. From couples fighting to countries at war, I can't understand why logic and common sense does not prevail. I know so many people who will fight tooth and nail over the smallest, most insignificant of things. These thoughts of how difficult it is to build relationships reminds of what my father told me a while back. He said that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that Allah guarantees a house in paradise for one who gives up arguing, even if he is right.

So life is about trials and I was thinking that Jaffar Chacha's displeasure at everything that was going on with his wife was not only expected but required. He is in-charge of leading his family through life. Not only was she going against him, but, in this instance of credit it inevitably leads to interest which is haraam (a thing forbidden in Islam) and results in going against our

Creator and earning His displeasure. Therefore, it is an important issue and definitely one that cannot be overlooked. There can be no compromise on issues pertaining to one's faith.

"Her next move was to get her driver's licence." Picking up where he had left off, Jaffar Chacha went on.

"But that would've been a big help to you I'm sure." Abdullah sounded very confused. "Plus you would have added free time to pursue your other interests!"

"Son, by now you would have gathered that practical me would have given her some advice as to why there was no need for it." Jaffar Chacha said to him, "Firstly, I asked her what her next step would be after she got her license. Obviously she would now want a car. If she got the car, next, she would need somewhere to drive to. Maybe she would join the trend of taking the children out of the neighbourhood school and sending them further away. That would give her somewhere to drive to with her new license and car. I reasoned with her to try to get her to see that she was being trapped in a materialistic lifestyle consuming whatever was produced no matter the cost on the earth. I already had a drivers licence and this was enough for our family. We could get by as a family if she did not drive.

I went on to say that the parking and the maintenance would be an added issue.

Today, each member of the family has a car and traffic and parking have become never-ending nightmares. Besides all of this, we are ruining our environment with this kind of attitude. One person per car just does not make sense. She would not listen. So I managed to find her a female driving instructor."

Abdullah replied sheepishly, "Jee, Chacha. That makes so much sense. I never thought of it like this. I myself have been waiting to turn 18 so I can get my driver's..."

"Ah enjoy your youth! Driving isn't as amazing as one would believe. After the novelty wears off it becomes a chore unfortunately." He patted Abdullah on his back encouragingly before continuing, "My Doolhun was working from home and now had a female driving instructor - yes Islam teaches that unrelated men and women should not intermingle freely and it makes perfect, logical sense."

"This is true Jaffar Bhai!" My father sat forward looking earnestly at Jaffar Chacha. "Look at how corrupt the world has become because of this free intermingling. It has permeated into our society as well! Zina (relationships out of wedlock) is becoming so common these days.

"Such ("true" - Urdu), Goolam bhai! it just results in problems." Jaffar Chacha said "Oh, I must share something I once witnessed!" He leaned forward. "I was

working under a desk, fitting a plug for a computer in an office. The secretary was standing next to the desk and in walks a co-worker. He did not see me under the desk and he began to sexually harass the woman. Both were married, but not to each other and yet this did not stop him. Such behaviour could get out of hand and result in two broken homes or even in the assault of the woman.

If you look at teenage pregnancy in South Africa... it is so out of control with thousands of teenage children falling pregnant each year and its all the result of free intermingling. Some in their early teens and majority unmarried. It is such a common problem that people no longer react to it. It has become the norm. The reality is that it will result in one messed up generation of imbalanced adults who are really going to bring grief to society and their parents."

"Islam has all the solutions, Jaffar Bhai." My father responded, "If only people would open their hearts and minds. As Muslims we have all the answers in our Quraan and Hadith shareef."

"Sahi baath! Hum log kya karna! Aaj Kah bache log kuch nahi sunatha!" (Its the truth! What can we do, todays children no longer listen). Jaffar Chacha switched to conversing in Urdu with my father as is common amongst their generation.

To us he said: "Your Abba Jaan (term of endearment for a father which literally translates from Urdu to "father-dear") is right. The solution is simple and it is as taught to us by religion. Adults and even mature children should not intermingle freely with the opposite sex. Intimate relationships between the sexes should not be allowed in children and only take place within a marriage."

"Jaffar Chacha, you are so right about the movies." I couldn't help but interrupt. "As a child growing up we watched cartoons innocently, assuming it was age appropriate. But all this talk about intermingling between boys and girls has made me realise that all these kid's shows encourage relationships between the genders even in young children. These cartoons made it seem as if such relationships were normal!"

Such things as Jaffar Chacha was talking about had never before crossed my mind. Not only was he bringing the corruption of the world to light, but he was also bringing out the beauty, correctness and goodness of religion. For a while now, I am beginning to see that this corrupt, modern, so-called democracy is completely twisted. It has a complete disregard for rules that produce healthy, well-balanced individuals but instead pushes this agenda to further all that is corrupt and wrong with the world.

In my research of the LGBTQ issue, I found that the solutions that democracy has provided is resulting in endless problems. Right from high court disputes about transgender people competing in the Olympic games, to which public toilets they use and even the words the dictionary uses to address gender. Same sex married couples are even fighting the constitutional court to have the right to adopt children and they are pushing for laws to compel religious priests to perform their wedding ceremonies. Where is the common sense in all of this?

No matter what solutions society comes up with for these problems, there will always be new ones arising because it is unnatural and upsets the balance of life. Let's face it, we can't change nature to suit us. Democracy fails to see this and recognize it. A male wanting to be a female is as absurd as a human wanting to be a sheep and expecting everyone else to call it and treat it as a sheep.

It basically sums up to psychologically messed up individuals who want to alter the world and all that is natural instead of correcting and solving their own issues.

All this is a result of the world drifting away from religion towards a way of lawlessness, just following their evil carnal desires. No, it's even worse! These people want to corrupt others and promote their ways.

Jaffar Chacha picked up where he had left off: "Most religions do not allow divorce. Islam does, however, it is discouraged and done only as a last resort because it is something that is not pleasing to our Creator. We are supposed to overcome our differences and make our marriages work and in doing this, it develops our beings and makes us better people. It's very difficult, almost impossible, to see our own flaws. But when we interact with others, especially in a marriage, we get to learn about ourselves. Our spouses are like mirrors that can reflect our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Because of the close, intimate interaction and sometimes conflicting situations, we are able to realise our true selves through their reactions to our actions.

Unlike our parents who love us unconditionally and may very often overlook our faults, our spouses see us as we are. We all are "work in progress" essentially. We should be constantly working on ourselves and improving our character. The honest reaction of one's spouse can be invaluable on this journey of life provided we are open to criticism and want to change for the better. Obviously our pride is our biggest hurdle. We must be honest with ourselves. We need to be careful how we approach each other. The best attitude to have to this is, no matter the manner in which our spouse highlights our weaknesses, we should always remember that this is a favour to us. We should not get upset but rather try to take heed. If the mirror reflects dirt on our faces, it's foolish to break the mirror but it is better to

use this information to clean ourselves. So our spouses bringing up our shortcomings is not a disadvantage but on the contrary a very great boon!"

"And what do you do if your spouse does not want to take heed and work towards a solution?" Outspoken Abdullah once again asked the question burning on my mind!

"That was my problem!" Jaffar Chacha admitted. "My marriage was on the rocks. There was just no way that we could go on in this manner. We were supposed to be a team working in unison. I had reason and good motivation behind all of my objections and despite this, she just didn't care about what I said or what I wanted. She did as she pleased without any explanation.

In terms of solutions, it was either I tow her line or she tows mine. Someone has to lead and someone has to follow. If I had to tow her line then this is against common sense and the teachings of our religion. This would mean me sacrificing truth and justice. Furthermore, if I concede, there would always be new issues arising in future."

"But these Issues don't seem like tremendous, life altering issues. You have managed to find her a job from home and she now has a female driving instructor." Abdullah reasoned with Jaffar Chacha. As big as his

mouth was he was not a confrontational person and he did not like hearing about disputes and fall-outs.

"These disagreements may seem small but they could have potentially led to bigger problems in the future or she could later want to do something major against my wishes." Jaffar Chacha responded to him. "Had I given my heart completely to her, I would not have been thinking like this but instead I would have given in to her completely. Thanks to my Creator, my Doolhun was not my principal love."

"SubhanAllah! Jaffar Bhai, the wisdom in this is immense. We are told to love but no one teaches us how to love. I think love with boundaries is very important in a marriage and even in child upbringing."

"Haa (yes - urdu) Goolam Bhai! Boundaries!" Jaffar Chacha nodded in agreement. "To me, us working as a team, working as one, is the foundation of our family because this is where peace and happiness begins. I simply had no choice but to fight for what was right, not just for my happiness but for the well-being of my entire family, including my Doolhun.

So I put the heat on her and she was resisting. We were past words. We were moving towards a cold war, hurting each another with our actions. we were drifting apart. It was very painful. I, at one point separated my bed from hers and chose to sleep in the children's room.

She was the one that eventually capitulated and initiated the makeup but I messed up. I assumed that she learnt her lesson when she wanted to make up. I should have brought up all our issues before making up. It was stupid of me; swimming the seven seas and getting drowned in a cup of water. Really disappointing of me. I, maybe, could have solved our problems at this point and saved all the aggravation that was to follow. But alas..." His voice drifted off. I could see the growing intensity and despair almost, that slowly etched across his face.

He went on, "Our problems continued. So when she said that she wanted to go overseas for Umra (a religious journey to Makkah and Medina) with our third child, I did not use too much of words to explain why she shouldn't as I normally would. Instead I said "No" in a very low, intense tone and then said "Now do what you want to do". My choice of words, tone, facial expression, lack of interest all showed that I was extremely upset yet she did not catch this or chose to ignore it. She got her passport, paid her deposit for the tickets and was making her final arrangements.

I would find myself pacing the neighbourhood at two in the morning. My marital problems were suffocating me, it was really hurting me. One such morning, a question popped into my mind. "Do you want to divorce her?" I was not angry at this point but I was contemplating or maybe complaining to my Creator. It's as if He asked me this. How very fortunate I was, I replied "No". Thank You

O Allah! Shukar Alhamdullilah! I think that all of these problems were my test and I think I passed them when I said "no". To me, nothing in my life, or shall I say, the most important things in my life did not come easy.

As an example, on the spiritual side, our Spiritual Guide set up an organization and I, although not a trustee initially, was always at the forefront and this had never been easy. One would think that our Creator would make things easy if you are striving in His path but on the contrary, it is as if He purposely puts hurdles along the path. It took me a very long time to realise that the religious work does not matter to our Creator as much as we do. All these trials are there to make us better people. This is what is important," he leaned forward in all seriousness. "I want to say it in a different way. Allah does not need our prayer or our charity or our canvassing for Him, but these things are there to make us better people. So although I did not realise it back then, our marital problems too, was something that pushed us towards becoming better people.

One Wednesday night, I brought up my issues with my Doolhun and I told her that if she cannot listen to me then she must get her brother to pick her up the next day to take her to her parents so that she could think it all over. I knew that she was working for my brother and she would find it difficult to do so on a working day. Words failed. My actions failed. Now, I was pushing her into a corner so our conflicts were forced to the

forefront and she could no longer avoid them. I was hoping that she would mess up so I could cause a scene. I was just not prepared to continue living with these underground problems. It was either make or break.

She fell straight into my trap when she did not get her brother to fetch her on Thursday. That night we had a major argument. I was loud and my parents and brothers came rushing in to see if things were ok. I had my ducks in a row and I listed all the times that she got her way against my wishes. Her working, the accounts, the driving, the TV, the whole works and at the end of it all, I gave her the first divorce. And just like that, without fully knowing the extent of what I had just done, our marriage was forever tainted. This was very wrong of me. Divorce is no light matter. May Allah forgive my impatience!

It was a really ugly scene. My parents and children got to see all of it. The image of my children silently watching with tears rolling down their cheeks is a memory I will never forg-e-et!" Jaffar Chacha's voice faltered.

He stopped to regain his composure and wiped at the tears in his eyes. It's strange, I had teared too and this made me think that perhaps this too is also a part of our spirituality, to feel the pain of others.

After composing himself, Jaffar Chacha went on: "We have guests over on a Thursday night and unfortunately they were witness to my outburst. I even argued with my brother and somehow it resulted in a broken window pane. My family liked my Doolhun. They were taking her part and I was happy with this. As I said, I did not want a divorce but I wanted our marriage to be a good, wholesome and a happy one.

The extended family can play a big role in the success or failure of a marriage and our families, both mine and hers, played a positive role in resolving our differences. When things got too heated on that Thursday night, my cousin, the bosom friend of my father's, took me out for a drive to cool off. I returned home to find my dad sitting on his rocking chair facing the doorway. The stern look on his face reflected all of his displeasure with me. I asked for forgiveness for my actions and language and he did not reply. Instead he continued just staring at me angrily. I could not withstand his gaze and buckled onto my knees, with my head on his lap in tears." Again, Jaffar Chacha was in tears and had to take a moment to regain his composure.

"Sorry! These are really emotional moments in my life." He apologised quietly. We just nodded our heads. The moment too intense for words even.

"When everything had boiled over that fateful Thursday night, in anger I had told everyone the reasons as to why I was giving my wife a divorce and it clearly showed her in the wrong but none of my family was sympathetic towards me. My dad, as I said, gave me the treatment and did not soften to my problems. My family did not ask for details or make any mention to it after that. And now that my sons are married and they live with us, I have come to understand the situation my parents were facing. I now have to consider, if one of my sons and his wife had to have a problem, how would I react? Even if my son is one hundred percent right, I cannot take his part. I look at my daughter's-in-law as a trust, not just to my sons, but also to me. They are more than my children. I have to consider how I would react if my child is one hundred percent wrong. I would still feel for him or her and would never just discard them. Similarly I have to behave in the same way with my daughter in laws and son in laws."

I considered the things Jaffar Chacha was saying and realised that they were imbued with wisdom. I read somewhere that knowledge is one thing but wisdom is another. Wisdom is about joining the dots, applying our knowledge, using our judgement, using our conscience and whatever else we have to arrive at the best possible outcome. Jaffar Chacha seems to be doing just this, not only in the way he was trying to establish a solid foundation for his family but also in the way he sees through the glitz and glamour and links our social

problems to our lack of religious commitment. I remember coming across a verse in the Holy Quraan, "... whoever has been given wisdom, has truly been given much good ..."

Jaffar Chacha continued, "Fortunately our arguments were just raised voices, pushing and shoving. Everyone got to see and smell a part of our dirty laundry but this was a small sacrifice to make. I wonder how it would have turned out had I been discreet. I think, had I gone this route, there was a far greater possibility that we would have ended up divorced completely. It's a sad state of affairs that our religion is not taught to us properly. Had I depended on what I had learnt in madressa or what I had learnt from the sermons in the mosque, I could have certainly been at a bigger loss in that I could have given her Talaaq (The process of divorce in Islam) completely. 'Talaq' is supposed to be given in 3 stages, at 3 different times but due to lack of education, men sometimes issue all 3 at once. This is against Islamic teachings.

Fortunately for me, I had learnt a lot on my own and this helped to a large extent but it was still not good enough. I had assumed that if I gave her the first divorce and if we were to reconcile then I would once again have three divorces but this was not the case. I later discovered that our marriage will forever be tainted by this one divorce. It can never be mended and there will never be that original, pristine marital status. We will

always be a marriage with just two talaqs left. Anyway, the next day, Friday morning, her brother picked her up along with the TV."

This time Jaffar Chacha did not tear, but his eyes reflected just how deeply he was hurting.

Doolhun, The Bride

Muhammad, peace be upon him, created an 'Umma' (a single brotherhood or community), which was so tightly bound together that when one was in pain, then the entire community was in pain. Building such a community starts off by being good to those closest to us, our parents, our siblings, our spouses, our children.

Chapter 8

While Jaffar Chacha was talking about his marital woes, I was thinking that divorce was becoming so common in our community and from what he was saying, I was beginning to understand some of the underlying causes of marital break ups. It's very complicated if not broken down and explained as he was doing. Apart from this, from what he was saying, we are exposed to so much of western influence which is all about seeking our own comforts with no social rules. No one wants to make sacrifices to build relationships.

I just cannot see anyone getting this right these days. The world is just so messed up at this point, no one wants to follow the difficult right way, everyone just wants the easy way out.

Jaffar Chacha was saying; "Had I known that my marriage would never be the same after that first divorce, I probably would have tried to use other ways to get through to her. Perhaps get our families together and ask them to help us to resolve our issues. This would have been the more mature way, the more rational way, the more decent way to resolve our differences.

Even more so because both of our families were fair and just and would not necessarily take sides or encourage a break up unnecessarily. The Holy Quran teaches that if there are good arbitrators from both sides willing to bring about reconciliation then Allah would bring about reconciliation."

SubhanAllah, Waah! How merciful is our Lord!" My father cried out. He always got emotional when he heard something inspiring about our Creator.

"I wish I had known this back then, Goolam Bhai. I should have at least discussed my problems with someone and maybe, in this way, I could have found a solution. This should have been the next step to take before going into divorce. How I wish that I had considered this then. I was young and naive and I also think it was a result of the lack of Islamic education in our community. People need to know that divorce is no light matter and that couples need to put everything into making their marriages work. They need to know

about ways to resolve conflicts. They need access to good Islamic counselling. They need to be taught and encouraged to seek advice and not be shy to do this. Is it not better to seek advice and get it right than to fail to seek advice and get it wrong?

On the flip side, resolving issues is not the easiest of things to do. One way or the other, it is unpleasant. However, I feel that it is something that needs to be done so that we can help each other to grow in our personalities and develop our relationship to reach its full potential.

Sadly there were times when I considered overlooking my problems and instead working my way around it. But I realised that these unresolved issues will always be there and sooner or later it would eventually catch up with us."

Jaffar Chacha paused briefly, "Anyway, while my Doolhun was away, I spent the weekend alone in my room and my parents never spoke to me about my marital problems. My mother, as I said, was a wise lady and just by her actions and expressions, I could tell that she was concerned about me. Although I had solid grounds for my actions, she never criticised my Doolhun or consoled me or encouraged me towards fighting or breaking up my marriage. This was a very mature way in which she handled our problem from her side.

Whenever one faces problems, we ponder deeply and this is a good thing. I spent the next two days alone mulling over my problems and the possibility of ending up being permanently alone. I want to share some of my thoughts with you so that you would appreciate my whole experience.

Getting divorced in Islam is a lengthy process and to me this lengthy process gives the couple ample time to make sure that this is what they want. Its like a trial separation before the actual separation. The procedure is that after pronouncing the first divorce the couple has three months to reconcile, if they fail to reconcile then the second divorce is given by the husband and they have another three months to work things out. If they still feel that they should divorce after this period, then the third divorce is given and this is the actual divorce and is effective immediately without the three months wait that is in place in the first two divorces."

"How come I never knew this." I asked out loud more to myself than anyone else. "So the couple actually has six months to make a final decision?"

"That's correct, Ahmed Ali" My father answered me and further elaborated, "Divorce is serious and not to be taken lightly. Once a husband divorces his wife he cannot reverse the situation so easily. A divorced couple cannot remarry each other until the wife marries someone else and is separated from her new husband

either by his death or divorce. So getting back together is like an almost impossible situation."

"All these laws are like compelling the married couple to ponder, contemplate and analyse their feelings and not make a hasty, rash decision." Abdullah added

"That's correct!

Shukar (thanks) to Allah for this guidance otherwise, by now, I could have been completely divorced." Jaffar Chacha said soberly. "All these thoughts ran through my mind and I am sure it was running through her's too."

This conversation made me realise that religious teachings are so well thought out. Every minute detail there to lead towards growing our characters and building successful relationships. All this made me realise that religion has to be from Allah alone. No man could have thought of all of these finer details so perfectly because we, human beings, learn by trial and error. I know that giving all three divorces at one time is un-Islamic but some people in our community, because of the lack of education, make this mistake and then regret it. So it's important to know about our religious teachings and follow them.

There is absolutely nothing to lose by taking time to make a big decision but if we make a hasty decision there is a lot lose. I think it is because of pride that

people give all three divorces at once. Why else would a person do something that goes against our religion!

Jaffar Chacha's story continued: "I was also thinking that if my marriage failed, I was not prepared to get married again. Prior to marriage, I was just getting comfortable with being a bachelor and one of the main reasons for my getting married was that it was a practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and he very strongly recommended it. He said things like "marriage is half of faith" and "those who do not marry are not of me." To me, my first marriage was fulfilling his teachings and if it did not work then I know I did my part.

I, very much later, realised that I was so wrong in thinking like this. Attaining faith through marriage is not about just getting married but it is about learning to get along with another and to grow to love them and to make the relationship work. In doing all of this our character grows. Attaining faith is not easy, we have to strive to attain it and our marriage, full of trials, was a means for us to attain faith."

While Jaffar Chacha was saying this a whole lot of pieces of the puzzle was falling into place in my mind. A major part of attaining faith is through wanting for others what you would want for yourself and marriage is one of the most important relationship in which we can

learn and implement these teaching; care and sacrifice for one another...

Jaffar Chacha was saying "I was thinking that my Doolhun had some exceptionally good qualities and although I was having these problems with her I had no right to judge her. I, myself am not perfect, how can I expect her to be. We are all going through trials. We all sin and make mistakes. What if I was in her shoes... I may have handled this situation very badly, far worse than she did. As I said, she was not one to express her views and discuss things. Maybe I should have worked more on this and spent more time with her. I said to myself that if I got a second chance, I would have to try harder.

As for the children, if we separated, either I would take care of them or she would. If she did, I was prepared to pay maintenance and be there for them but I was also aware that children are often used as bargaining chips in a divorce or they are used to take revenge and I did not want that to happen to my children. Apart from that, as you can see, we had different views to life at this point and I would not want to confuse them. Rather, I thought that it would be best that she bring up the children as she saw fit.

I then wondered if my actions were justified. Was I doing the right thing? I was a young man and I did not know too much about love but what I knew then was

that we have to respect and obey those above us and we have to go that extra mile to serve them. I did not know, at that time, that this respect and obeying the people above us is the kind of attitude that leads towards love, or that this is the first step towards love. Think about this: How can love bloom when there is no respect, caring and sacrifices?

However, intuitively this was the kind of attitude that I always had towards those above me. When it came to my parents and my Spiritual Guide I tried to be totally committed and I wanted to do things that would make them happy. As I already said, I wanted a wife that would get along with my mum. This is caring for my mum. I wanted to live with my parents so as to make them happy and be there for them and to help them. This is caring for my parents. I respected them and went out of my way to serve them as best as I could.

These are not things I say to show off but these are things I say to show that love is earned. For my dad, I would spend weeks at a time repairing his car. My children were my parents joy. I gave that to them without them having to physically care for them. As to my Spiritual Guide, his wish was my command. I would give anything and everything just to see him smile. I hope I made them happy and I wish that I had the opportunity and the resources to have done more for them. May Allah, through His infinite Mercy bless their souls endlessly. *Ameen*"

While Jaffar Chacha was telling his story I was trying to make sense of it all and this is what I am coming up with. There are different ways in which we must handle our different relationships to build love. Firstly, our relationship with our Creator where we give all without any reservations, then those who are above us, such as our parents which is also close to the way we serve our Creator and for a woman she has to listen to, and obey her husband in the same way. Then there are relationships where we are on the top, such as a husband with his wife and children. So what's coming through is that when we are at the bottom then we need to serve and obey those above us and when we are on top then we have to ensure that those below us behave in a manner that promotes good relationships which amounts to practicing tough love. Tough love does not mean being cruel and unkind but it is about striving against wrong and promoting good so as to teach. We are in control of the relationship and we must lead it towards building love. Well I hope my understanding of it is correct.

"Now," Jaffar Chacha said. "My Doolhun had little respect for me as her husband at this point in our marriage. She did not listen to me. What made it worse is that I did not want her to listen to me because I am the head of the household but I wanted her to follow what I was saying because it was common sense and what our religion teaches. Still she did not listen or even try to discuss what I said but continued doing what she

wanted. I just could not understand this because in other ways my Doolhun was such a lovely person and as I said, she was hard working, she never got angry, she was not argumentative, she was not demanding, she got along so well with everyone including my parents which was important to me."

Jaffar Chacha just added in another piece to my understanding of the "tough love" bit. In the past, according to my dad, parents could command without explaining but today, with all the outside influence, such as social media, parents need to explain things so that their children could make a more informed choice. This means being educated in terms of religion. Although Jaffar Chacha's explanations to his wife did not work initially, he now had solid grounds for his arguments.

"That Sunday morning," he continued, "as I played scrabble by myself to keep occupied whilst pondering over my problems, my dad knocked at the door and when I answered he said in a stern voice: "I don't care what or how you do it but I want to see my grandchildren here today." He was using his position as the head of our family to instruct me in the best possible way and he too, like my mum, never said anything the whole weekend, but gave me time out to cool off and think over things. I cared for my parents and I knew that all of this was really hurting them too. Had my dad not said this then I probably would not have phoned her on that Sunday morning. I needed this

push from someone and he so wisely gave me that push and I think it was at a very calculated moment. He did not rush it or leave me too long. I was already beginning to miss her. I called her, and after greeting her I asked: 'are you coming home or not.' She said that she wants to come home. My Doolhun might have made a few mistakes but I give her full credit, may our Creator bless her abundantly for not having pride and trying to be right when she was wrong. She was being just and fair. *Alhamdulillah!*

"You both are very lucky to have each other. It's a rare find such a gem of a partner." My father said thoughtfully, "I make so much dua for our children to find good spouses. This can make or break them. May Allah always guide them on this journey!"

"Ameen!" We all chorused in response.

"I think my Doolhun and I are sensible, reasonable people because we did not need six months to work things out. The two days was more than enough for us to figure out the way forward." Jaffar Chacha picked up where he had left off.

"I want to give an example of how unreasonable people can be in conflicts and such people can make life really difficult. Just recently, a group of us had an appointment to meet at a certain time to do something good and wholesome. Some just never pitched up and

when I brought the matter up, instead of apologising, one began to find fault with me and began to attack me on other unrelated issues. These issues that he brought up, or shall I say created, was not a problem to him before but he brought it up simply to try to deflect from his own faults. The other did not apologise either and shut me up angrily when I tried to explain how much of misery he caused us. Such reactions stems from pride and if we want to have good relationships then we have to learn to accept our mistakes and apologise.

When somebody shows us our faults, they are doing us a great service. To me, these are the best of friends. It's not easy to show someone their faults because we run the risk of ending up in an unpleasant situation like it was with the ones that never pitched up.

Alhamdulillah, my Doolhun swallowed her pride and did not respond by going on to attack me in some unrelated matter but she still could not apologise. As for me, I always valued relationships and people's feelings right from a child. I can go on my knees to apologise even if it is for something small which I did unintentionally. Sometimes I did not even need people to tell me if I am wrong, just the look on their face was enough to melt my heart. *Alhamdulillah*, All praise is due to Allah for giving me such a boon.

So when I went to pick up my Doolhun and the children the first thing that struck me was that I never saw my

Doolhun sadder than on that day. That image too will stay with me, always fresh, till the day I die. She seemed to have wilted in just those two days. I really wish that I did not have to do all that I had done back then and that I could have found another way to resolve our problems.

Men are so much more robust and I hate that about myself. I hate the role of having to be the head because upholding the law is not easy when it comes to disciplining. Having said that, I know for certain, that I will always try to uphold the law and stand up for truth and justice but I pray never to be tested in this way again.

I just knew that standing up for truth and justice, however difficult, is the only way to eventual success. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that even if my daughter Fatima, (whom he loved dearly), were to steal, I would punish her accordingly. This is tough love. The outcome or the end result is what is important and I am not referring to the hereafter only but also to our happiness and well being right here on earth."

Jaffar chacha said: "The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said that the highest degree of faith is to physically do something about the wrong we see. A lower form of faith is to talk against it and the weakest form of faith is to think bad about it."

My father leaned forward as he did when in an intense conversation. "That is so beautiful. If everyone does this then the world would be a place of milk and honey."

"Jee Goolam Bhai, so true" Jaffar chacha continued, "Had I overlooked my marital problems and went with the flow then we would have been in an unfulfilling, unhappy marriage; we would have been two, moving along different paths and not one; we would have never grown our personalities and this in turn would have messed up our entire family in the long run. So even to this day, I still feel that what I did, although unpleasant, was very important and it is because of this that we ended up with a better relationship."

"That makes sense, Jaffar Chacha." Abdullah who had been quietly listening now intercepted. "As difficult as it was for both of you, the result of a happy, stable and Islamically correct home is definitely worth the strife."

"The thing about relationships is that, in a relationship there is no 'you' and 'me' but it is about us. Teamwork! We cannot have our own ways but we have to follow common interests. It boils down to following rules so that we do not infringe on the rights of others or abuse their rights and what better rules to follow than the rules laid down by our religion.

"I suppose good and bad will always be in conflict." I said quietly.

"That's true and that's why there will always be conflicts on every level. If we want to build an environment of good, then it boils down to having to fight and strive against evil and overcoming it. It's naive to think that we can attain peace on any level without striving, corporal punishment and violence, as a last resort of course.

Blatant crime is out of control in the world today because society does not mete out the appropriate punishments for serious crime."

"Remember what Ma used to say when she used to go for *Hajj*? Abdullah asked me and went on, "She said it's so safe in Saudi Arabia. At night at the bazaar, the stall holders just throw a sheet over their stock and go home. No one would steal"

"Can you imagine doing that in South Africa!" I said to him and we all had a good laugh at the sad state of security in our country.

"That's exactly it, boys!" My father said to us. "If you are caught stealing in Saudi Arabia it's off with your hands. Clearly corporal punishment works because Saudi Arabia is a very safe country."

Human psychology is such. Sometimes talking and reasoning is enough. Other times it isn't." He sipped on some water and continued, "My arguments and striving with my *Doolhan* was for good, sound, principles as taught to me by my religion. It wasn't for my own

personal gain. In Islam, striving against our baser desires is what is most important. This is the first level. So from this major fight that we had we learnt to control our urges. She no longer did what she wanted to do but instead followed my lead and the important thing about my lead, is that it was based on the teachings of Islam."

Jaffar Chacha was making sense here. From my observations I have seen some couples living together but following different ways and towards the end of their lives, they have pretty much nothing in common. They seem so distant to each other. Come to think of it, the role of strong husbands has taken a real beating with all this "women's lib" agenda worming its way even into our Islamic society.

Modern society seems to be grooming the man to become patsies and grooming the women to be overbearing and forceful. This goes against our natural instincts and what Allah created us for. Another important factor that he was highlighting was that the path that the couple must take, must be a religious one. I have seen couples follow a materialistic way and they never content. At the end, when they attained so much of it, they still cannot let go because every time they set the bar higher. The couple still fight over finances.

His story continued: "It was my shortest visit to my in laws place that Sunday. They never asked me a single question and I am pretty certain that even if my bride

did not spill the beans, they would have definitely sensed that all was not well. My father in law was in the same situation I was in. If he allowed his feelings for his daughter to overpower him then our marriage could have been lost. He did what was right, by silently praying instead of venting his feelings." He paused briefly, lost in thought,

"Life's a challenge, sometimes we're in the furnace, sometimes we're on the anvil beaten by the hammer, sometimes we in the refreshing cool water but at the end, if we hold together, we become the pride of our Creator.

My spiritual guide used to say: 'a diamond is cut and polished hundreds of time before it is fit to adorn the ring.' My dad used to say the same thing in a different way; 'Henna is ground to bring out the colour in it'.

This was one of those trying times when we were all in the furnace together. It's difficult to judge one's self, but for all the others, they seem to have weathered the extreme situation and came out stronger, even better people."

"Jaffar Chacha," Abdullah called: "You are reminding me of a scene from the TV serial Dirillis Erturgel where Ma Hyma gives her son advice. Problems are like an oven and we are the dough. We either turn into bread or get burnt and end up as ashes."

Jaffar Chacha smiled and said: "Exactly, I am glad you are thinking. I also liked that part too. From these problems I faced, I learnt other valuable lessons as well. Like how to control my urges. I was not intimate with my wife for days on end. I learnt that Allah is very close to all of us because He talked to me in my darkest times, I learnt to be more considerate to others, to do my bit instead of depending on my wife for everything. I learnt from my elders how to handle conflicts. These problems also helped me to have a closer relationship with all those around me. I learnt to value the people around me. I learnt a lot about myself and how people and society operates and most importantly I really felt for my Doolhun. She won me over completely.

I feel that the main reason my Doolhun did, all that she did, was because she wanted to conform with society. This society pressure is so strong that even sound reason and logic could not get her to change. Only the intense pressure of a looming divorce got her to change.

So trials or our carnal desires or the devil in the long run is good for us because we learn so much from our mistakes to eventually bring out the best in us. This is what life is all about and my Doolhun and I were making the most of it. Allah has put us to trial so that we may emerge or transform to become better people and to fulfil our destiny of being the best of creation."

I considered all that was being said. There is so much to learn and achieve from striving towards just/good/wholesome goals but I must say that this is one really difficult path. Both of them seem like they went through hell. I can't wait to hear their outcome. How did they eventually find their happiness...

"I am very fortunate that my *Doolhun* valued our marriage so much that on the verge of divorce she decided to completely change and listen to me and follow my lead no matter what the whole world thought of her. I am certain that it must have been very difficult for her. Somehow, I had never faced this problem myself. I could listen to and follow the dictates of my religion and my Spiritual Guide no matter what the rest of the world thought of me. Then again, maybe I had not always been like this. Overcoming my own dark stages in my early life humbled me and taught me this obedience. After getting out of the gutter, I would always pray to Allah to help and guide me and make me steadfast on His path. This is a Muslims greatest prayer, the prayer of Surah Al Fatiha, which is the opening chapter of the Holy Quran. If read sincerely and with understanding, one can never go wrong because Allah is the best guide.

"Jaffar Chacha made eye contact with each of us, as if he wanted this important message to stay with us.

"Our make up was not like all the other times." He went on, "There was no joy at the end of it. We were right next to each other but we were far apart in feelings. We were so far apart that I wondered if we would ever recover from all of this, there seemed to be no light at the end of this tunnel.

Everything was just bleak, gloomy and depressing!

Doolhun, The Bride.

You can study God through everything and everyone in the universe, because God is not confined in a mosque, synagogue or church. But if you are still in need of knowing where exactly His abode is, there is only one place to look for Him: in the heart of a true lover.
Hazrath Khwaja Shams Tabrizi RA

Chapter 9

"Jaffar Chacha, please tell us what happened after your Doolhun returned home." Abdulla pleaded.

"Before we go there, I want to talk about why I did all that I did, why all of this was so important to me." Jaffar Chacha responded to him. "To me, life is not only about living or trying to stay healthy because we are all going to get sick and eventually die no matter what we do. So too, it is with careers, money and good times. It all eventually adds up to nothing. So I never focused on such things. I did what was necessary but I never put my heart and soul into it like the way my Doolhun had been doing right up to this point.

The Holy *Quran* talks of the two highways: one is this material world, money, fame and good times. Worldly matters is something that is tangible, something we can easily see and understand. A career, spouse, car, house all of that. The other highway is seeking Allah, who we

cannot see or fathom, well, not so easily. This is like an impossible journey or at least, a very difficult one. This is what I primarily strived towards; knowing our Creator.

Allah is not something I came up with but it's something that people throughout time talked about in all religions. To me, it's not something to ignore or treat lightly. If someone tells us to wind up the windows of our car because thieves would rob us at an intersection then most of us would religiously do this. Why do we listen here and not there?"

He paused briefly looking around at us even though he didn't expect an answer, "Losing a cell phone, that's something we can replace but not getting to know our Almighty Creator, that's like choosing to live life in blindness.

When my Spiritual Guide, may Allah's Mercy be upon him, asked us to define love we could not give him a definitive, clear-cut answer. Google it and see for yourself, there is no fixed definition to love. He then said that if there is a cause (something), then there has to be a source or an explanation. He said Allah is love. After the name of Allah, His most important names in Islam are 'Rahman' and 'Raheem' both of which stem from the root word 'Mercy'. Mercy is based on caring which in turn, is based on love. In Islam, relationships are important, loving people for the sake of our Creator

is a part of faith because it leads to knowing our Creator."

We all fell into a deep silence. Each lost in their own thoughts. Jaffar Chacha's words about love gave us so much to think about. I felt so shallow thinking about my own personal understanding of what love was. It is so much deeper than I could've imagined.

"To love, is beautiful." Jaffar Chacha continued: "It's a wonderful feeling. It is the best feeling and by far the most satisfying thing that we can do in life. The foundation of Sufism is love and all it's poetry is mainly about love. In Sufi terms, it is intoxicating and I humbly add, exhilarating.

My Spiritual Guide said that humanity was created for love and not for worship, as most of us think. The angels worship God perfectly and we cannot come anywhere close in this regard. However, love is far superior to worship and this is why we, humans, have the potential of being the best of creation. Worship is only one small part of love.

Think about it. As I said earlier, we have to build an environment for love to blossom. We have to be serious about religion and love. Although I did not know this at that time, this is what religion is geared towards: love! By me following our religion, I was unknowingly building an environment for love to blossom.

Now, my Doolhun prior to this point was not following our religion completely, she was not supposed to be materialistic, she was not supposed to get into debts unnecessarily and she was supposed to listen to me. This needed to be put right in order for us to live a life that Allah wants us to live and at this point, I did not know, that this was what was required for love to blossom.

I want to talk a little bit more on love so that you will understand the problems and situation we were encountering. Sufism teaches that to love just so as to feel this feeling is a disaster. We call such a relationship infatuation, it's a soap bubble ready to pop at any second. It is like building a castle without a foundation. It is probably wasting a golden opportunity because of the impatience to feel love

In *Bird Parliament*, a Sufie poem by Faridudeen Attar, it is related that a slave loved the Queen. She called him and gave him two choices: marry me for one night and lose your head the next morning or turn around now and run away. When he turned to run she struck his head off with her sword. She then said that had he truly loved his queen he would have given his life for her but he loved life more and justly died.

You see, we all desire to have these feelings of love. It's a beautiful feeling but to love just to have these feelings

is being selfish. It's about yourself, your feelings and not love really. True love is caring and serving the other."

"That's very deep indeed, Jaffar Chacha!" My insides were burning with all these thoughts and questions that I had. "Selfish love... that sounds like the opposite of what real love should be!"

Jaffar Chacha made so much sense. My dad once quoted a verse of the Holy *Quran* to show how important love is. It is the eighty ninth verse of the twenty sixth chapter: "*But (he alone will be saved) who comes to Allah with a sound and pure heart,*" And the heart is all about love.

I was truly enjoying all the inspiration as well as the warnings regarding love that Jaffar Chacha spoke off.

Such well-thought out details about principal love and how love is earned. I agree that without such things as respect, there can be no love. It's simply infatuation. What is strange is that no one talks or teaches us about love yet it is such an important aspect of our lives and religion too. What a shame, truly!

"One morning I went to a local flea market and met the parents of one of my college associates." Jaffar Chacha continued, "His mother looked so sad, hunched over her pot, busy frying *samosas* to sell. I did not ask about her son because once, many years ago, I had asked about

him and she had sadly replied that he did not keep in touch with them. I did not want to reopen old wounds.

I remember back in college, I would sometimes visit him at home, he would hug his mother and sister with such enthusiasm. His behaviour made me wonder if I even loved my mum. He would laugh, hug his mum and say such lovely things to her and at that moment, I had wished I could have had that relationship with my own mum. So naturally, when I first heard that he does not keep in touch with them I was shocked. I just could not believe it.

I learnt a valuable lesson from it all: Love is not based on superficial words, superficial actions and cosmetic looks but it is about truly caring for one another come hell or high water and making sacrifices for one another. It is based on what's inside us, our commitment for the wellbeing of others.

Although my college associate's actions were inexcusable, I still considered what role his parents had played in grooming him to become the way he had turned out. Sometimes, as parents, we unwittingly encourage our children to chase after a career and all it comes with, and when they leave us behind for it, we wonder why."

I thought of my own relationships. I had to admit it's of the 'soap bubble' type, and I tried to remember the

actual word for it... Ah, infatuation. Giving your heart away before someone earns it!

"So," Jaffar Chacha went on, "In many ways, my *Doolhun* and I had some good things going for us, although we were not conscious of it at the time. We were not infatuated with each other and somehow, from the beginning of our marriage, we never threw each other up by celebrating birthdays, valentine's day, wedding anniversaries and such, the way my college buddy had. Yes we would greet each other, every morning and at night and this Islamic greeting is actually a prayer for the person you greeting - May Allah grant you peace.

As I said in the beginning of my story, we only exchanged gifts in the tenth year of our marriage. It was not on a special occasion either but it was at the spur of the moment. Somehow or the other, we did not care for such trivialities for just a few days in the year."

Don't get me wrong. Giving gifts to one another is a good thing that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, encouraged this. But giving gifts on special occasions while ignoring the persons needs in their difficult times or being disrespectful to them is wrong. There has to be sincerity and genuine care.

"Hee hee, Jaffar Chacha!" Abdullah as usual, not able to resist a good jibe, "you were supposed to be on the

honeymoon phase of your marriage. Usually the couples are madly in love in the beginning till this phase wears off. You did it in reverse."

We all had a good chuckle. But it brought a lot of truth to light. This was exactly the situation of our times. People fell in love or rather infatuation in the early days and then fell "out of love" very soon after. What Jaffar Chacha and his wife had done, somehow seems more real. They are building a strong foundation for their love to blossom.

"Jaffar Bhai, didn't your wife expect anything of you on all of these occasions?" This time, my father was the curious one. "Most women just expect it."

"Surprisingly enough, no!" He responded. "Maybe it was because we were in an arranged marriage that she had such low expectations. No, I think it has more to do with her character than her situation. She was never a demanding person. Always a giver and never a taker. Even with me, she expected very little off me."

"Ah! *Allah ta alla*, in all His wisdom makes the most perfect matches!" My father replied. "Indeed, he does!" Jaffar chacha continued,

"A thought just struck me about our gifts. It was so symbolic, even though we hadn't realized it then. Her gift to me was elegant, stylish, fairly new and now I have even learnt that it is a branded garment. In a nutshell,

something worldly and when she handed it to me it was as if she was surrendering her worldly self to me. My gift was a cheap, old piece of cloth that had no monetary value but it meant a lot to me and she accepted it and treasured it like I would have. It was as if she gave away a life of materialism for a life of far greater value."

"I want to say a little more about gifts and these so called special days we celebrate today. Growing up, in our generation, we never had such special occasions. No one ever celebrated my birthday. Not even my twenty first. As for my father, we never ever had a birthday celebration for him. The only time I knew how much my dad loved me was the day he came to visit me in hospital. His eyes were bloodshot red. He was barely in control of his emotions. Although I was in pain, I had to smile and comfort him by talking in such a way that it made him feel good.

I also did not know it then, but true love is something that's built on sacrifices, hard work and doing the right thing. It is not instantaneous but brewed over time. Love is not based on superficial looks and gestures but it is built on sincerity, commitment and sacrifices. How can you not care and love someone that goes out of their way to make sacrifices for you? I will quote a couplet by Rumi, peace be upon him:

"Love is not easy, It is a sea of fire

And one has drown in it as one goes through."

Jaffar Chacha was not painting such a rosy picture of love that's for sure. We somehow, always have the expectation of love being beautiful and perfect. The way he had described it, it was more about hard work, sacrifice, striving and sometimes giving up on one's own desires and goals to follow someone else's. That, honestly did not sound appealing. I just don't know what to make of it. But one thing I know for sure, people throughout the world are having tons of problems in this department of caring and loving others, and we can easily see this when it comes to marital breakdown and even countries at war.

"Religion, especially Islam, places a great deal of emphasis on love, so much so, that loving others for the sake of Allah, holds the highest rank." Jaffar Chacha went on. "And why should it not... this is Allah's greatest attribute. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, lived a life of serving others, he loved for the sake of Allah and it is because of this, that people love him even to this day. So although I could not pinpoint Allah out to my *Doolhun* because He is beyond shape and composition, His signs are unmistakably all around us. Provided we ponder and take control of our beings by being humble, we will get to know Him. Most importantly, the way to realise Allah and get to know Him is true love. Love leads to faith and we have to grow this with everyone around us. So to me, 'marriage

is half of faith', was no longer about just getting married, but rather about making it work in the best possible way. This means going about it in a way that allows love to blossom. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that the best of you is he who is best to his family.

I was searching for Allah and at that time I never even have the remotest of notion, that Allah, in the highest degree, is all about love.

Doolhun, The Bride

Humanity is the best of creation, providing we grow ourselves spiritually in this life and, we love our Creator by loving His creation.

Chapter 10

"The Holy Quran teaches that if we do not grow ourselves spiritually then we will end up being lower than the simplest of creation." Jaffar Chacha continued to share from his wealth of knowledge.

"Although I did not know much about spiritually at that point, it is what I wanted to strive towards and I would have liked my Doolhan to be on the same page as me. Now getting her to be on the same page as me is what I strived towards.

The immediate changes that we went through after our get together was that she cancelled her overseas trip, she left work, we cut up the cards and I took on the responsibility of paying back the debts. I remember that it was a huge amount. Maybe not to the average person, but to me, as a person that lived on the bare necessities, it was huge.

Allah is ultimately the provider and if you ever live the way we do, then you too will perhaps have the blessed opportunity of experiencing His magnanimous bounties.

The one thing that I missed though... was watching Mike Hammer!"

We all guffawed!

My father playfully tapped him on the back and said:
"Jaffar Bhai, hey! You are something else!"

After everyone settled down Jaffar Chacha continued,
"Our reunion after the first divorce felt even worse than our marriage. When we were getting married, my concern was that I did not love her. Now however, after the immense hurt we caused each other, it felt even worse as if we were starting off from a negative as oppose to nil when we got married. There was a huge gulf between us now. This disagreement was far greater than all the other times when we had problems and had made up. We were back to a normal routine but there was no joy and it was like this for months.

Although this was the case on the outside, in reality we were now in a much better position in our marriage because we now knew each other better. We both now knew what pleased the other, and what ticked the other off. We were both trying to make adjustments to best accommodate the other.

I did not realise all this back then because our problems over-shadowed everything. Just want to add; had either of us decided to throw in the towel, it would've been such a great loss. Not only now, but at any point in our

marriage. When we are young we don't realise that encountering problems is a part of growing relationships and divorce is like breaking down a half built house. To pluck up the courage to start up a new relationship again after a break up, such as a divorce, is difficult. The worst part about it, is that one is still going to encounter problems in the new relationship. It's expected in all new relationships especially one as intimate as marriage. So now to me, divorce is not an option."

"I have to ask," my brother leaned forward with a mischievous gleam in his eye, "You have told us what ticked you off but you have not told us what ticked Doolhun *chachie* (aunt) off?"

Jaffar Chacha chuckled and replied, "Perhaps me getting what I wanted at her expense" and continued laughing and we all joined in. He put his hands up and said more seriously: "she never had any major problems with me but she did admit that my smoking annoyed her because of the stink."

I couldn't help but laugh out loud at this. "It's reminding me of the first time you met her and her family Jaffar Chacha! That stompie you put in your pocket..."

"She probably despised your smoking from way back then." Abdullah added and everyone laughed.

"Hey, you know," Jaffar Chacha said to us, "As I said she never complained and I really had to really dig it out of her. And she did not complain further but I realised that I had over burdened her by asking her for tea every half hour." His tone took on a seriousness, all trace of humour gone. "She already had a lot to deal with in terms of taking care of our young children and I had been inconsiderate."

"It sounds like you are starting to care about her deeply, Jaffar Bhai." My father said.

"That's true! Goolam Bhai. Indeed I was". Jaffar Chacha went on, "So I kicked the smoking habit and pulled up my socks by doing more for myself at home, like making my own tea and making and picking up my bedding.

This communication between us was good, we were talking about our inner feelings. This process of getting to know each other and making adjustments for each other was a huge step forward towards us building a far better relationship and ultimately a successful family and, just maybe, a stronger, real bond of love between us, but there was one big obstacle at this point.

My Doolhun was forced to give up on what she wanted and no one would like this to happen to them. Think about it? How would you feel if you went through what she went through? She had to give up on an overseas trip, she had to give up working, she had to get rid of her TV. I mean, these are the things she wanted, these

are things she strived for and she put a lot into attaining them and now she was forced to give up on them. It must've felt like the rug was pulled out from under her. Yes she gave up on all of this but she was not taking it well initially. I suppose she was justified in feeling like the way she did.

On a higher level, she had fixed notions about life. She had some sort of direction or goal and purpose. Now though, after our argument, all her goals were destroyed. She had nothing to work towards. We all need something to strive towards and she, not having a direction, was in a limbo, neither here nor there. She was lost and this, I think, was why I felt our marriage so gloomy at this point. It hurts to see someone like this.

I know what this feels like because I went through a similar experience with my Spiritual Guide a few years earlier. I too was left with nothing to cling onto or nothing to stand on and strive towards. Whatever I learnt and whatever I believed in or whatever I achieved in my life to that point meant absolutely nothing to me. It's as if I was turned upside down and emptied of everything, except for my Spiritual Guide.

As to my Doolhun, she was left with just me. Maybe this is the way to attain love, or this is the way that spirituality is taught. Empty whatever is inside and then refill it with what needs to be filled in."

"That's a very interesting and thought provoking way of putting it." My father responded.

"Yes, logically it makes sense. Throughout our lives we are exposed to all sorts of stuff. Good but also a lot of trash." I gave my input. "In this way, you can start fresh and fill your cup with only goodness!"

"Exactly that!" Jaffar Chacha said, "So she was, somehow, going through the same experience. I felt that religion and spirituality, or in a nutshell, Allah, were the things to replace her worldly goals with.

Now, how to persuade her of it...

Living an Islamic way is what I wanted because it leads to eventual happiness, inner fulfilment and all round success. She needed to adopt this way and do it willingly and sincerely and not because she was pressurised into making this change. I did not want her to do it because of me but I wanted her to understand and do it on her own. Just practicing religion ritualistically, to me, is futile. There has to be our full inner conviction and commitment behind it. It's easy to make changes within ourselves but just how does one help another to go through this process.

All I could do was to talk about religion in such a way that it brought out the deep inner wisdom in it. It is only when we understand something will we be able to appreciate its value."

What Jaffar Chacha spoke about, getting someone to willingly change from the bottom of their hearts, sounded impossible to me. People have huge egos and everyone wants to be right.

From all that he said, I more and more became convinced that religion has such in-depth knowledge that can only have a positive effect on our lives. Moulding our characters and improving our relationships, all of this leads towards peace and happiness. If we are happy, what more can we ask for?

"Life is an opportunity." Jaffar Chacha continued, "This world is like a workshop in which we mould our characters and help one another to improve ourselves. Even an atheist would have to accept that good and bad (or evil) exists. Kindness, sharing, loving, respect, modesty, obedience are all good character traits while greed, hatred, spite, pride, bribery, vengeance, showing off are all bad qualities - evil. Our challenge, I said to her, is to develop the good qualities in us and destroy the bad.

What's more, I had explained, is that how we behave individually as people is not something that is personal and it's not something that affects us only but our behaviour is something that influences the family and even society. Imagine a world full of thieves, murderers or liars. Our actions affect others. They can hold us to account and we therefore, have to live and behave in a responsible manner. Basically, this attitude of, 'its my life and I will do what I want' is the wrong attitude to

have when we are a part of a family and a part of a society. We have to learn to work as a team.

Much of spirituality I had already learnt about by sitting in the gathering of my Spiritual Guide. I too, like my Doolhun had to learn to control my desires and follow his guidance. Sometimes I did not understand and once I even felt that what he said was wrong (may Allah forgive me for this) but I towed the line. Knowing the theory of anything is easy but putting it into practice is very difficult and it is only after putting it into practice that one finally understands and sees the wisdom behind it all. So although I knew the theory behind spirituality, I was having difficulty getting it across to my Doolhun.

Initially, she was not too receptive. So in trying to get her to understand, I myself, was learning so much. Much more than even her. And of course, these discussions were bringing us closer. We were really getting to know one another indepthly. Peace and contentment are the results of a spiritual life. These are the gems of life. If we can attain this, we would have made a success of life because it results in deep inner satisfaction and happiness.

At that point I thought that before we actually went on to discussing and learning about spirituality, we needed to bury materialism for good. So we discussed materialism on different levels: personally, in a family,

in society and in the world. In terms of this world; our world at different times were ruled by different ideologies, the Greeks with philosophers such as Aristotle, the Roman and Persian empires. Just over fourteen hundred years ago, the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, peace be upon him, was born and for many centuries a large part of the world was ruled and influenced by Islam which he founded. His rule was based on truth, justice and love. It was the dominating force, or as we know today, the super power of the time but gradually, in the last two hundred years, this has all changed.

The capitalistic or materialistic powers have gained control of the world and they still rule the world today. At first, the materialistic powers simply raided and colonised countries. South Africa and India, as examples, were British colonies. Now they have gradually progressed towards also attaining their materialistic goals diplomatically or shall I say deceptively. They encourage people to be materialistic by following their carnal desires, they dangled carrots in front of people and get them to chase these things, positive stimulation.

So these super powers of today are not based on justice or religion but they are based on making money. They would even destroy another country just for money and power and this is how our world is today. These capitalistic people that rule the world today, have only

taken that knowledge from previous generations that can benefit them in terms of making money. Medicine, maths, science, technology... They took all this knowledge from previous generations and built on it but they left religion and spirituality out completely. Not only will spirituality not make them money but it will go against their agenda because spritual people do not care too much about worldly matters."

He paused briefly. We all listened in silence completely enraptured by all that he was saying. Could what he said be true? If what he says is true... we've all been hoodwinked. I felt disgusted at the thought. As if I have been lied to all my life... what if he was correct? He had to be! He was obviously someone who had found happiness. Isn't that what we are all striving for... happiness! Have I been fooling myself all my life? I just always assumed that a career, a wife, a home of my own would all bring me happiness and contentment. But then that would mean that people who had all of those things would not need to work and strive harder and thats not the case.

"We also talked about materialism on a personal level. I told her that I had learnt early in life that material possessions brought short term happiness. I remember really wanting this electronic game once and when I acquired it years later it did not bring me the joy I had anticipated."

"That is reminding of a job I recently did in an upmarket penthouse." My father said. "What a view! Spectacular is an understatement! The first time around, I spent a good hour taking in the views but on subsequent visits I hardly noticed. I once even tried to sit and enjoy it like I had initially but I just could not. The novelty had worn off."

"It's like that with everything. An acquaintance of mine bought this house with a swimming pool. The first summer his kids were in the pool everyday but in the next year they hardly used it. When I spoke to the kids about it, they said that they only get into the pool when cousins come around." Jaffar Chacha replied.

"So basically, I was trying to tell my doolhan that to put so much of effort into acquiring such stuff, like a penthouse does not bring about long term satisfaction and contentment. Unfortunately, we would only realise this at the end, when it would be too late.

The way I am putting all this across to you is fairly orderly, clear and precise but at that time, it was so different. We discussed different bits and pieces at different times. So all these things I am telling you is not what I came up with but they are things that I learnt over time from different people and my Doolhun contributed a lot as well. We both were learning and growing along the way.

Knowing ourselves and controlling our urges is an important part of Islam. It is a necessary part to our spiritual growth and one aspect that we need to control is our greed for wealth or materialism. We, human beings have a latent, insatiable greed to have more and better things. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that if a person were to possess two valleys full of gold he would still long for a third. We see this all the time, presidents and cabinet ministers taking bribes although they earn so well, wealthy taxi bosses murdering their competitors, countries invading other countries to steal their natural resources. Basically there is no peace and contentment when it comes to materialism.

My Doolhun, as you already know, had these issues as well. I myself, battled with this issue from time to time. Why, just recently I spent days thinking of whether I should have medical aid or not."

I have to admit I was a bit confused by some of the things that were being said. But I do see where he is going with all of this. He is trying to say that he was trying to get his wife to be interested in the same things that he was interested in so that they could become closer and live in unison. Sounds good to me and even the goals of spirituality, knowing Allah, finding love and finding peace and contentment all sounds like excellent goals to have. As for materialism, he made sense but I just don't know

if I will be able to implement this in my life. It is difficult. I somehow have to make this change because I think that this is a part of faith too. My dad said that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that a man of faith does not care about material possessions. I am really beginning to appreciate this teaching of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Doolhun, The Bride

Faith is about believing in our Creator not so much by words but, more importantly, by implementing all of Allah's teachings into our lives weather it appeals to us or not.

Chapter 11

Whilst these thoughts were running through my mind, Jaffar Chacha went on: "Just as one cannot make anyone drink water if they are not thirsty, one cannot truly teach anyone until they want to learn. This is especially important in religion, we have to want to follow on our own accord and not be pressurised to. Sincerity! You see, if Allah wanted, He could've made us all believers but He has given us freedom of choice, so that if and when we do believe on our own accord, then we would be the highest of creation, because our belief is earned by us wanting this and going through trials and making sacrifices.

So there was no way that I wanted to force religion onto my Doolhun but I instead wanted to awaken a desire in her for religion. This is a very difficult task, almost impossible because everyone has their own views and opinions, even our very own children. As I told you, I set about this daunting task by providing her with information and discussing things with the hope that she sees it.

My Doolhun was also my spiritual sister in that she and I, both had the same Spiritual Guide. She was not exposed to the teachings of Spiritual Guides until we were married and perhaps she just became a disciple because of me. But I suspect that it is more. Anyhow, during this state of her not having a goal in life I began to introduce her to spirituality. This spirit of learning eventually became the glue that bonded us together."

Life is the greatest school and if we pay attention, there is so much to learn and experience. Our environment is huge but this is not all. What's inside us is by far greater. The modern world focuses on the outer self and we are completely ignoring our inner selves, our spirituality. Peace and tranquillity is not out there but it stems from within us. Even true joy or ecstasy is all within us and not out there in entertainment or other such things. Peace and ecstasy is just the tip of the ice berg; inside us is huge and endless. The knowledge of our inner beings is just as great as the knowledge of our outer world, no..., it is far, far more greater, far more complex because it's not just about design and engineering but it's also about thinking, feeling, exploring, perceptions, joining the dots and even getting to know our Creator. As an example, one scholar or spiritual guide enumerates fifty different levels to love."

Wow... From whatever Jaffar Chacha was saying about love, I am actually beginning to realise that there are different levels to love, from caring for someone we do

not know to the principal love being the ultimate. And we think we know it all with our degrees.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "So these were the kind of things we talked about and these are the basics to spirituality.

Apart from materialism, there is a lot more we discussed in terms of religion and spirituality such as this: A part of knowing ourselves and controlling our carnal desires is that we need to realise that we all desire to stand out, to be recognised as the most knowledgeable or the most pious or the most beautiful or the one with the best built or the one with the best car and so forth. The bottom line with this kind of behaviour is that it is still like that child showing off his toy. The great reformer Allama Iqbal said that if we want that true status then we have to destroy this craving by reducing it to ashes and from these ashes will grow roses and gardens. Controlling our urges is growing up, this is becoming a better, secure, more well adjusted person, that is able to get along better with others. These are the kind of things we talked about and I was hoping to get my Doolhun to be interested in this and to strive towards this.

My Doolhun was not the only one guilty of trying to show off or trying to impress others, the only difference being that, I somehow had this ability, gift, or Grace from Allah to realise my mistakes and put them right on

my own. When I wore that brief costume, I intuitively knew that it was wrong, and although it took me a while to understand why, I finally put it right.

We all have this problem and even I, after knowing about all this, sometimes still have problems in this area. As an example: I was involved in a religious organisation that just did not strive to serve the community in a straightforward way, but instead it always tried to be ingenious in its approach because this is what it takes to teach religion in the competitive times that we live in. So I came up with a lot of excellent ideas over time and, this one time, I was really thinking that I am brilliant and it went on for a few days.....PRIDE! Although I was not showing off to others, it was still wrong. The whole idea that I was working on failed and this made me sit back and reflect. 'Shukar' (thanks) to Allah for showing me my wrong and allowing me to realise my mistakes. It was a lesson to me that all inspirations are from Allah, all praises are due to Him only. I was merely a conduit and although, being just this, is a great achievement, it is still solely by His Grace. The rose is so beautiful, how much more beautiful is its creator, can the rose exist without the Creator? I hope I learnt the lesson and never forget it. So my bride and I had to overcome issues like worrying over what others will think and say. In the first year of our marriage," he went on. "I designed a dress for my Doolhun, the fabric, the cut, the design, was all put together to create an impact. Yes, an impact! I realised my mistake when she

adorned the finished product. Do I need to put my wife on display? Do I need to show her off? Without me realising it, I was being influenced by the modern lifestyle as depicted in movies to show off.

Let alone kissing my mum, I never saw my dad hold her hand. Although we lived together for years, only once did I sensed that they had a good, strong bond of love. I had the blessed opportunity of spending time with my Spiritual Guide and his wife for two years. Their affection too seemed so ordinary. There was no fireworks to see but even they had had an immensely close bond and I picked this up on just one specific interaction. She jarred him out while walking pass and the way he responded, his tone, told me that they had a strong bond. Their affection was so subtle that one would most likely miss it. Even if one caught on, they would be left wondering if it really happened.

That generation never showed their affection yet they treasured each other and spent their lives together while we today display our affection but within a few months we end up divorced. So at that point I could not explain why I was having doubts about the dress I designed but I just intuitively knew it was wrong and stopped the charade."

Interesting, what Jaffar Chacha was saying. A whole lot of flashbacks popped into my mind about how I had also tried to be in the limelight. Once I was working on a

painting and I showed it to my dad. Although he said it was nice I went on about it, bringing his attention to certain details. He asked, or rather said: are you fishing for compliments.

I had to lower my head, pride comes before the fall. Most people would not tell you that you are showing off but they will certainly think of you in that light. I am very much aware of showing off now and I try not to do this anymore. Thanks to my dad. As Jaffar Chacha was saying, we have to grow out of this carnal greed that we all have.

Meanwhile Jaffar Chacha was saying: "After the dress episode, I learnt that, I too, like my father and spiritual guide, should not show off my wife or our affection or our children or anything else for that matter. My Doolhun has also learnt this after our argument. She is no longer influenced by others. We were out of the race. We had better things to do than trying to keep up with what others do or try to do. It's such a relief, no stress.

There is absolutely nothing to be gained by showing off one's knowledge, piety, wealth or beauty. On the contrary, this kind of behaviour can cause jealousy and envy, and the evil eye could cause problems in the good that we have. More importantly, it can cause harm to the spiritual aspect of our beings, it makes us proud. We become shallow people constantly seeking praises. Our

evil, carnal desire loves to show off and if we want to be secure, well adjusted people then we simply have to curb this urge to show off within ourselves. This is so important that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that modesty is a part of faith and I add, faith is more important than prayer.

Islam also teaches us to hide our good deeds: when we give with the right hand, the left hand must not know about it. The main reason for this, is that exposing our good deeds could lead to us thinking good of ourselves, it leads to pride: self worship. Unfortunately I am forced to share a bit about the good we do but I do it with the hope that it can inspire people to have better relationships with their spouses. Alas, I must admit, I am skating on thin ice.

May Allah, the All Knowing, through His unfailing Mercy, save me from seeking out praise and may He forgive us our shortcomings."

"Ameen!" We chorused

"Now, my Doolhun and I, we were no longer interested in 'Keeping up with the Joneses' or doing things to impress others."

Saying it like this made it sound easy. Naturally, when we achieve something, we want to shout it out loud and tell the whole world. Keeping it quiet... I don't know if I can do this, I reflected quietly to myself.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "This is what a marriage should be, an institution of learning and perfecting our characters, leading unto attaining faith. All praises is due to my Creator for giving us such lovely boons in life, to have given us the ability to ponder about life, to learn about ourselves and grow our beings instead of just living life seeking material comforts. I know I would never be able to thank Him enough. Figuring out all of this together was starting to bring us closer together and it was also very fascinating.

So, after purging ourselves of materialism and the need to show off, which was like removing the weeds from the garden, we set about planting the seeds of spirituality and love.

The answers to life is all around us if only we took the time to question and search. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that good questioning is half of learning. So, every now and then I would say something to her about the deeper aspects of spirituality to get her interested. Small things. It took a long while but finally, she showed interest and asked a few questions. She was showing signs of wanting to know.

I don't think many would appreciate how great an achievement this is. I know a Spiritual Guide would sacrifice anything to win over even one heart. I am saying this from experience. When I gave my heart to

my Spiritual Guide I acknowledged him in a certain way, by way of action indicative of complete submission, and he in turn did the same to me. I just could not understand at that point why he would show such utmost respect to me but now I do. It's difficult, almost impossible, to win a heart and he finally achieved it.

A heart is priceless. How ironic, the point at which I submitted and wished to stay on the ground forever gave me the complete opposite. It made me into a person that could say and do so much, to really impact other peoples lives.

So my Doolhun, by asking questions and wanting to know more, was in a way, amounting to her looking up to me for guidance, I was winning her heart and she, like me, was also attaining a higher level. We also talked about things like patience, not only in terms of facing difficulties but also in the way of enduring hardships when it comes to giving up sin and bad habits for the sake of our religion.

As an example, like everyone else, we also wanted the good things in life too but we had to curb this urge and sometimes, because of not having things, it was difficult and this is where the patience comes in. What I had difficulty in understanding is that sometimes we were earnestly doing good work but it was still so difficult, almost impossible because of the hurdles.

I realized that our Creator does not care about the good work as much as He cares about making us better people. As I told you, my one brilliant idea failed but I learnt so much about myself from this failure. So these trials, that we were going through, were there to make us better, more enlightened, to eventually transform us into the best of creation that we supposed to be.

So, with my minimal earnings and her not working, things were difficult but my Doolhun was now prepared to endure all of this."

Jaffar Chacha paused and we sat in silence briefly. "I have to say, that some of the things we talked about are not things that I can write about because in teaching spirituality one has to first win over the heart and I cannot do this by way of a story. One has to have a Spiritual Guide and one has to grow to love him completely to learn these aspects. It's important to learn to submit and to be able to follow.

Imagine you trying to teach a child to read and the child insists that he knows how to read and rattles off his A,B,C's. You see, the teaching process requires not only a good teacher but also a good pupil and a good subject matter. I think my Doolhun and I became good pupils when we each learnt to submit and follow. As for the subject matter, spirituality or 'tasawaff' is truly amazing knowledge, all powerful knowledge; if only we could open our hearts to it. There is simply no word I could

use to aptly describe to you how great this knowledge is."

While listening to Jaffar Chacha I was trying to fit the different pieces in. His story is not a straight forward love story between him and his wife but it is also about all our other relationships including that which we have with our Creator. He has even thrown in love for this material world into the mix. On top of that, and my favorite part, he has included some indepth insight into how we human beings tick by telling us about his inner feelings and desires and how we need to get these things right so that we have better relationships all round and finally growing relationships of love. Complicated but interesting!

Jaffar Chacha continued: "By going through our marital problems and our subsequent discussions on such things as spirituality, materialism, the importance of religion and so forth, my Doolhun was beginning to see a new goal to her life. She was no longer interested in money and worldly comforts."

From what Jaffar Chacha was saying I am picking up that we should not just follow anyone in life but we must ensure that we follow the right people and ponder and question things. I like the part about questioning ourselves because this helps in self realisation. What can be more important than knowing ourselves because this would help us to be more efficient in life. Brilliant!

Jaffar Chacha went on: "This protracted make up period was the time that we really talked about life in a very fruitful way and we would discuss what we wanted to achieve by the time we reach our end. It was really deep stuff and we were baring our souls or inner beings to one another. We were really getting to know one another in the most intimate and complete way."

While Jaffar Chacha was talking I was thinking about what I wanted to achieve in life. I must admit that up until now I was thinking of a career, car, house, wife. Now though, Jaffar Chacha has exposed me to other goals. Although the Spiritual path sounds so noble, the materialistic path is really attractive but, from what Jaffar Chacha is talking about, this materialistic path ends up to be eventually pointless. I wonder what I am going to end up doing. Will I muster up the courage to follow a more meaningful life or will I just surrender myself to the dictates of my carnal desires.

What was also nice about what he was saying is the way he and his wife were becoming one when it comes to even thoughts and feelings. This is amazing. To me, he has achieved the impossible.

"The Holy Quran", Jaffar Chacha was saying: "Talks of the world as being glitz and glamour that distracts one from the true purpose of life. My Doolhun and I, we were just so fortunate to have had this kind of guidance which enabled us to see through the glitz and glamour,

so that we could strive towards that which really matters.

I must add that the spiritual path is a lifelong struggle and there is always more to accomplish as you will see."

I could relate to what Jaffar Chacha was saying. My brother and I do not get along all that well because we do not have common interests. Jaffar Chacha and his wife had to find their common interests and this brought them together. What a lovely way to build relationships but the problem is to find common interests and not all interests could lead to so much to talk about and to work on.

I am thinking that religion and spirituality especially, is something we can all talk about and I feel the way Jaffar Chacha awakened this interest in his wife was very smart. But then again, the interest has to be there, the emptying of ourselves of other interests, the submission, the dedication and I think that only a Spiritual Guide could help us do all of this.

Well I must say, Jaffar Chacha has got me somewhat hooked and although it was getting really late I wanted him to continue.

Doolhun, The Bride

We all have a raw diamond deep within us, which we need to find, cut and polish in this workshop, that they call, the world.

Chapter 12

"Jaffar Chacha, I'm hooked." My brother said, "I know that its getting late, but please, I would really appreciate it if you would continue."

"Most certainly my son, I am glad you are enjoying yourself. It encourages me and makes me happy too. Alhamdulillah, All praise is due to our Creator.

Anyway I think our marriage was turning out to be a good one. We learnt to consider, care and make sacrifices for one another. We had common interests which is religion and spirituality. We had common life goals. Basically we were in tune with one another and we were also physically involved, not only in implementing this into our lives but also, helping those around us. Our focus in life was getting to know our Creator, getting to know ourselves and now also building relationships of love with all those around us which entails making sacrifices.

Talking of sacrifice. I still cringe when I think of this incident! I was seventeen and to celebrate the

completion of school, I went on a camping trip with three school acquaintances. One of them took on the responsibility of bringing the tent, and he did, but it was a homemade contraption with a covering of hessian sack. During the day it was lovely but at night, when a cold wind blew, it was as if we had no shelter at all. As I got into my sleeping bag the guy I knew the least, who also did not follow the same faith as myself was sitting up. I asked him why he was not going to bed. He replied that he did not bring any beddings."

"Oh gosh!" My father said as we all groaned aloud.

"I turned to look at the other two guys for some help but they acted like they did not hear and actually turned their backs to the problem." Jaffar Chacha went on. "My sleeping bag was a single sleeper and there was no way that both of us were going to fit into it. I offered him my place hoping that he would refuse or at least ask me where I was going to sleep. No such luck! When I got out, he hopped in, turned around also and left me in the cold.

It was ice cold. By far, the coldest I've felt in my entire life. That wasn't all. I had to pull the entire night, and it had felt like it would never end. Now that I think of it, I wonder why I didn't start a fire. How silly of me. I suppose I was destined to suffer. I kept going over the whole incident all that night. I realised that despite how badly they had treated me, I was one hundred percent

certain that I did the right thing and if I had to go back, the only thing I would do differently would be lighting a fire this time around." We all chuckled but it did nothing to take away from the whole incident. I really felt for him for having gone through it all and that too, at such a young age.

"Alhamdulillah. May Allah SWT, in the names of His chosen ones (peace be upon them) , forgive my faults."
"Ameen!" We chorused!

"Being able to care for others by sacrificing our comforts is following the right path. It's really steep and scary. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has said that you will not believe until you love for others what you would love for yourself."

"Wah! Wah, Jaffar bhai! Such a lovely attitude to life. Caring and sacrificing for others, this is the kind of attitude and action that is required of us to attain closeness to our Creator. This is the kind of attitude that would nurture love in our families and the world. The kind of attitude that would bring peace and prosperity to our world. Wah."

Jaffar chacha smiled and said: "Jee Goolam bhai, unfortunately today, we are too materialistic and this makes us selfish. Come to think of it, I too, in that situation, could have done so much better. I should have got the boys together and had a discussion so as to

find a solution. In this process, we could have all learnt valuable lessons. Had we solved the problem together we would have been so much more appreciative of each other and we would have become so much closer as friends. I suppose I was just too young and immature back then to have reacted in that way.

When I think of sacrifices that others have made, I realise that mine was really just a drop in the ocean. Imaam Hussein, peace be upon him, is the name that is synonymous with sacrifices. He sacrificed his children and even his grandchildren for truth and justice for all of humanity. It's his heart-rendering example at Karbala that has always motivated me to sacrifice and strive for truth and justice. Although I have been through this cold episode I would not want to go through it again, not because of the cold but because I just might not be able to do the right thing. It's easier said than done though. Sometimes we think we can do it. In theory it's all too easy but when the actual time comes about we might just find an excuse to not stand up. This really scares me to the core.

My Doolhun too was naturally a caring person in many ways and when she had to make sacrifices to give up her goals for the success of our marriage then she reached a point where she could sacrifice anything and everything for the comforts of others, and I am sure that we can all strive to be like her if only we can create that mind-set. This is the important thing, to be

determined to serve and do what is right, come hell or high water. So my Doolhun and I, this is what we tried to do: help and serve others. This also gave our marriage more body in that we had many things to work towards together."

After hearing Jaffar Chacha talk about sacrifice, I really felt guilty about the way I behave towards my parents. Sometimes I get annoyed with my mum for disturbing me while I am busy on my phone. I am just entertaining myself with the phone while she is striving to do something for the good of everyone, like preparing a meal for us all. I simply have to get this right. I need to go out of my way to do things too. I have to learn, not only do things for the benefit of all, but to also make sacrifices. I am now realising that this is the way to build strong bonds of love.

I am also beginning to realising that although making sacrifices is for the immediate benefit of others, in the long term it actually benefits us the most in that we become better people and we become closer to our Lord. It is no wonder then that this is the way of Allah's Chosen ones, the Prophets and the saints.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "These teachings shaped our outlook to life and had a bearing on our relationship with others. We did not strive for ourselves and our children only, but we tried to sincerely care for others and serve them too like the way we would our very own

parents and children. We did not have money to assist others financially but we did whatever we could in other ways.

Closest to us were my parents. This is also a teaching of our religion. Start with those closest to us and this makes perfect sense. What's the point of feeding the world when our parents, siblings and children are facing difficulties.

So we, or shall I say she, sacrificed the opportunity of establishing her own home to the way she wanted and instead went along with me to live with my parents. This is not easy because a home, in today's time especially, is a women's pride and she had to give up on this aspiration of hers to instead live in a home that was set up by my parents. Living with others is not easy. One day I noticed that my bride was all pulled up. On enquiry, she told me that my mother swore her. I did not know what to say at that point, so I kept quiet and thought about it for a while.

When we think about things, it is amazing what we can come up with. Anger is bad because we react immediately without thinking and once the bullet leaves the barrel, there is no return. So I thought about this and a while later I asked her if she would swear a stranger walking on the road or a person that she did not know all that well and she said 'no'. Then I asked her if it was possible for her to swear her children and she

said 'yes'. I then told her that she is very lucky that my mother thinks of her as her very own child to have sworn her. She was all smiles. All praise is due to Allah.

Our carnal desires loves to find faults in others which in turn results in bad blood and bad relationships. Through experiences like this, we learnt through time never to think badly or react badly to what others say or do, because this leads to broken relationships. Instead we overlooked a lot or we gave people the benefit of the doubt and this helped us to keep our relationships. It's far better to have good relationships than have enmity and built up hatred which causes the most harm to us."

"Enmity, jealousy and hatred is like poison for our beings." My father said. "If you give in to it a little, it just consumes you."

"Very true Goolam!" Jaffar Chacha replied and continued.

"Although my parents were independent in terms of finances and doing things for themselves, we shared our children with them. This brought them great joy. In old age, people find it difficult to find things to occupy themselves with and our children kept them occupied and they enjoyed this greatly. When our children were out of line, we would bring them in line and when our parents had things to do we would make sure that our children were not disturbing them. Whenever we went out we took our children along with us because we did not want to burden our parents with having to look

after the children. Basically my parents enjoyed our children without having to look after them or having to reprimand them."

"Building relationships sounds tough!" I said.

"Indeed it is! It takes a lifetime of interaction and making sacrifices to build them." Jaffar Chacha said to me. "Although I am a child to my parents and they would do anything for me, I, as their child, still had to learn to reciprocate by caring and making sacrifices for them too. How often we see or hear of children deserting parents and some not even keeping in contact with them. So we tried our level best to make my parents happy by making things easy for them and we tried to bring them joy with our children. We gave them companionship and got all the difficult chores done without them having to do much. We did this right up until the last moments of their lives.

Days before my father got really ill, perhaps it was his last meal in good health, he repeatedly thanked my Doolhun for preparing the meal and she felt this gratitude unusual. Although she told him that she did not prepare the meal he continued to thank her again and again. It was as if he was thanking her for more than just the meal. It was not the normal thank you, because she sensed it to be different. He was saying in his own way, 'you have earned a special spot in my heart.' Now, this is what I am talking about, building

good, strong relationships with everyone and not limiting our love and caring just to our spouses and children."

"That sounds so wonderful, Jaffar Bhai!" My father said to him. "Both your father and wife sound like gems!" Jaffar Chacha nodded his head in silence.

After a few moments, he went on: "The thought of her strong relationship with my dad made me a bit jealous at first, but then I realised that it's team work. Her successes are mine, and mine are hers too. We are a team, we are one. Around the same time, my dad also shared a few words with me that I think were deep thoughts that he, not only did not share with anyone else, but also had kept a secret for many long years. He could not say it outright or spell it out and neither did I want to hear it. His whole demeanour changed to one of being very serious, intense and deeply emotional. His eyes said it all to fill in the blanks. We spoke without words and this is only possible between people when they have that bond of love. This is the power of spirituality and this is humanity's greatest potential."

He paused momentarily. "It was the same with my mum too. Minutes before she could pass on, I heard her ask for my Doolhun and I in a very urgent tone and as soon as we came to her she calmed down a little and wanted to go to her room. She laid down on the bed and within a few minute her life ebbed away. We had built such a

strong bond of love with her that even in the throngs of death she thought of us and wanted us close by. I held her hands, squeezed them gently and tried to get her attention but her gaze was fixed on death.

I think we finally grew to love our parents, well I hope and pray. If not, at least we tried. May Allah bless my Spiritual Guide and all our parents abundantly."

"Ameen!" We chorused.

"After losing my mother, we had the opportunity of having my mother in law come to live with us and she still lives with us up to this day. She is eighty eight at present and because she suffers with Alzheimer's disease, she is more than a handful. When she first moved in, about ten years ago, all she talked about was going and when we sent her over to one of her daughter's place she would do the same thing: move from one place to another for no reason. Sometimes she would just walk out of the house without telling anyone. When we tried to stop her she would get upset and kick up a big fuss. On one occasion, in the early days when she had moved in with us, after a big fuss at five in the morning in the middle of the road in front of our home, we sent her off to her daughter. My Doolhun and I were feeling very bad and we realised that this was just not going to work. She cannot be moving around from one place to another. We simply had to bite the bullet. We mentally prepared ourselves to take on anything as long as she was settled with us and had a

permanent home with strong bonds that would make her want to stay.

That very same day, we picked her up again and since then she lives with us. We have adjusted our lives considerably and given up on quite a few things that we wanted to do, just so that we could take care of her. Unlike my one night out in the cold, my Doolhun had to sacrifice years of her free time for her mum. There is a lot more to this part of our life with her, but the bottom line is that it's very difficult, extremely difficult and if we want to serve Allah then we have to build such strong relationships and we simply have to make these sacrifices. All religions teach that serving humanity is serving Allah. From such sacrifices, we learnt contentment, a really great boon, to be happy no matter what.

Sometimes, I wonder how we as a family, managed to cope with her and still maintain normality. My sweet Doolhun takes the brunt of it all and she takes all this with good cheer. On the bright side my mother in law is such joy in those occasional moments when she is in a good mood. I get to sing her songs, squeeze her hands, hug her and joke with her. These moments of joy makes it all worthwhile and I am pretty sure that if we live longer than her, she would leave us with lots of fond memories. It took us years, but slowly she talked less and less about leaving and now, she no longer talks of it at all. As long as my Doolhun is around, she is at peace. I

think she likes me too, I get her to smile quite often. May Allah, through the sacrifices of His beloveds, forgive our sins! Ameen!" "Ameen!" We all repeated.

While Jaffar Chacha was talking, I was thinking, his and his wife's sacrifices for the elderly members of their family seem so nice now, in the way he is telling it, but I am certain that it must have been very difficult for them. This is the thing with sacrifices, trials and hard times, it's almost unbearable when we are going through them but once we are past them, they do not seem as difficult and sometimes our memories of them are enjoyable.

I was also coming back to what Jaffar Chacha said about movies influencing us. I need to free my mind from these shackles the way Jaffar Chacha has done and instead try to enjoy being with my parents and the broader family.

Jaffar Chacha was saying: "What's more is that my wife's siblings are so warm to us because we take care of mum. They are so much more closer to us now and they get so emotional at times and they make lots of dua (prayers) for us. This is the thing about making sacrifices, it builds good relationships of love."

Doolhun, The Bride

It's no achievement to live alone, it takes no skill at all. To live with others to a point of being one is an astounding achievement. It takes the highest forms of knowledge, self discipline, self-sacrifices and wisdom to build such relationships. It's an inner journey to human perfection.

Chapter 13

"Over and above being there for our parents and our children, my Doolhun and I were also blessed with the opportunity to serve and contribute to the well-being of our extended family and even the community at large." Jaffar Chacha said. "As for the extended family, our home hosted a weekly prayer gathering *Khatme Khwajgaan* on a Thursday. Our entire family and even friends would part take in this event. This was a tradition that was started by my father and we assisted greatly in this. My brothers and I continued this legacy of his after his demise. One of its many blessings is that it's a great way for the extended family to interact. This interaction allows us to bond and build really close relationships with all whom attended. We got to talk, to share our problems, to learn about religion and life. Sometimes we go out on social trips together like an annual camping trip. We even work together on common projects in serving the community. What's more is that our children also meet up with other

children and its also a great opportunity for them to socialise in a nice, productive way instead of them being trapped by their cell phones. In this way we belong to a far bigger group than just our immediate families."

"That really sounds awesome!" Abdullah said, "I wish we had something like this. I would give anything to meet my cousins more often!"

"True!" My father gave his input, "This is what our society lacks today - socialising! Everyone is just trapped by their cell phones or their jobs"

Jaffar Chacha got me thinking; what he is talking about, a big group of people, interacting and having close bonds, sounds so wholesome. It reminds me so much of what my dad was telling me about his childhood and him living in an extended family. What I have noticed is that, not only does this not happen any more, but people today are even having problems in living with just the immediate family, divorce is on the increase and there are so many people that are not even wanting to get married at all. Aunty Shireen is like this. She is a career woman, never got married, wealthy, has a fancy house but she lives alone with her cats and dogs.

In talking about this, my dad mentioned that there are lots of young women like aunty Shireen today, working towards a career and not getting married. He quoted an online article in 'science today' called 'Can't buy my

love: materialism in marriage linked to devaluation in marriage'.

In this study, materialistic people are beginning to devalue marriage, and divorcing more easily. Basically it seems that people today are tending to live in smaller groups towards even living alone.

"Jee Abdullah," Jaffar Chacha said: "As much as we need our alone time, human nature is such that we need to socialise on different levels as well. It's good for our spiritual and mental state. I suspect that being alone too much causes all sorts of serious mental problems."

"Jaffar Bhai," my dad said. "Socialising is the balm for our souls".

My mum brought us chocolate pudding and we stopped to enjoy the sweet treat.

After dessert, Jaffar Chacha once again continued. "Nothing comes for free." He said. "It takes an effort to create an environment in which our extended family and friends could interact. So my Doolhun and I just did not strive for our immediate family but we strived for everyone around us. My hard working Doolhun, with my sisters-in-law did the bulk of the work by preparing the meals for everyone. This is a key part of what keeps this activity going. It entails making sacrifices and this is the only way towards building bonds with other members of our family.

The bulk of the hard work of seeing to parents and preparing meals for more than just our family, fell squarely on the shoulders of my Doolhun. On my side, I would take an active role in the religious organisation that our Spiritual Guide formed and our family members and friends, that partook in our weekly *Khatme Khwajegaan*, were also inspired to work towards serving the broader community too. So this weekly event was like a springboard for us to do community work. In this way, my Doolhun and I played an important part of building bonds, not just in our immediate family, but also our extended family and even the community at large.

Working hard and making sacrifices for the well being of all and building relationships of love is difficult. Quite often the people we sacrifice for may never realise it or show their appreciation but this does not matter.

What matters is that growing to love all those around us is deeply fulfilling. It's a step towards learning and understanding our Creator and knowing our Creator. It is not only a very important step towards spiritual achievement, but it also brings about *Sakinah* (the most satisfying feelings of serenity, peace, contentment and tranquillity.) It is like being one with the entire universe and beyond."

The way in which Jaffar chacha talked about all this aroused some feeling within me and it seems to have

the same effect on my father because he responded passionately by saying: "Wah (exclamation of praise in Urdu much like the English 'Wow!') Jaffar bhai! Such a lovely explanation. No wonder the Sufies say that love is the most powerful of all the different forms of power both physical and spiritual. It's the super power."

"Jee Goolam Bhai! When a Calipha (representative) of Allah loves you and when people like you, it is akin to Allah loving you and this is all powerful."

Jaffar Chacha went on: "Even recent statistics compiled by universities such as Oxford show that helping others is deeply fulfilling which brings about immense joy. But... it was not for this inner gratification that we helped others either. We did not limit our relationships but simply cared for others from the bottom of our hearts because this is what our religion, in fact all religions, teach us to do. Everything is from Allah and we were blessed with all these favours simply because we cared."

When he paused again, my dad said, "*Alhamdulillah*, all praise is due to Allah. Today people seek joy and happiness by going out for holidays and doing all sorts of things for entertainment but the best of joys are in being with others and serving others."

This conversation reminded me of the time I helped a struggling, poor person. It just felt so good, so deeply

satisfying. I also thought of my dad's retelling about his own youth, how they would offer their seats on the bus to the elderly but this does not happen anymore. It seems like society is evolving towards a materialistic life which makes people selfish. How terribly unfortunate!

Jaffar Chacha continued: "Jee Goolam Bhai, unfortunately very few people today strive along this path and realise the benefits of serving others. There is lots of good in it. Another example is that we don't remember when everything goes smoothly in our lives. Its as though these times and moments mean little or nothing to us. Almost as though we are wasting our life or not living it. Just as some extremely enjoyable times are good memories, the times when we endure hardship, especially in serving others, are also memories that stick. How strange! With the passage of time, these memories of our tough times become our fondest and most cherished memories. This is living life. So, this too, is another positive outcome of sacrificing for others but here again, we did not make sacrifices for any gain, well I hope and pray that we are sincere.

Towards the end, the Holy Quraan talks of the two highways: the easy downhill walk or the strenuous uphill climb. We were blessed to have taken the uphill climb. What a beautiful view it is from the top.

Alhamdulillah, (all praise is due to Allah) - in this way, Allah, Who sees and knows everything, has blessed us

with such lovely memories. There were so many times that I stood and cried because the trials were all just too much. Even in this broken state I would not surrender to defeat. I'd pick up the pieces and try to put them together again. I think... No! I know that at such times we are closest to our Creator! All praise is due to Allah for giving us these opportunities or means to attaining closeness to him.

I no longer face those days of trials, and as difficult as it was back then, I actually miss them. However I do not wish to be tried again, only because of the possibility that I might fail the test. The Holy Quran states that the life of this world is one of trials and I think that these trials are actually a favour and boon from our Creator because it is a means for us to better ourselves. To appreciate this... consider: a problem results in us seeking out and finding solutions and this is a step towards attaining wisdom. Therefore trials, in a way, are a good thing.

The trials that my Doolhun went through made her a better person because she learnt from her mistakes and put them right. Remember the gutter I was in, that was my trial. Gosh, it was difficult, just the thought of it scares the wits out of me. So, don't think I am great or a super human. I too went through trials, I was a disgusting person and changed and I'm still evolving, all thanks to my Creator who guided me, who strengthened me and forgave me.

So this is the path, spirituality, that I and later my Doolhun, took and strived towards instead of materialism. We cared little about wealth, name and thrills. You see, both goals are in opposite ends. If we chase after this world, materialism, then we are most certainly going to lose out on our spiritual development and, what's more, in the end, our material possessions mean nothing because we have to part with it. A loss on both sides. But if we go along the path of seeking Allah, there comes a time when the whole world is at your disposal but one cares little for it by then. Striving for the spiritual path is actually a win on both sides.

Material possessions brings short term happiness and also becomes a burden later because we end up taking care of it, we become slaves to our possessions.

If we want to have strong bonds with others then it means caring, sacrificing and going that extra mile for them. Even at fifty five my Doolhun works really hard to serve others, far more than she ought to or even needs to. Sometimes I actually have to force her to take a break. I feel that at her age she needs to unfortunately consider her health as well. I hope I am using my rationality in the right way.

Doolhun, The Bride

"On the path of love we are neither masters nor the owners of our lives. We are only a brush in the hand of the master painter." Jalaaluddin Rumi RA, may Allah bless him.

Chapter 14

Jaffar Chacha continued: "At this point, I need to tell you, where I put my Doolhun, in terms of love and why I did this.

As I have already told you, our marriage initially was not based on us loving each other for our appearances or because we clicked. It's not that I planned it this way, but I firmly believe that it was my Creator's guidance that took me along this path because I always prayed to Him to guide me. With time, I grew to like her and even love her but my love for her did not start off from the highest point but it gradually grew towards this.

At this point, I am very fond of my Doolhun, I adore her in so many ways, even when it comes to her appearance, but she does not have complete control over me and neither do I have complete control over her. I would say that we love one another in a different way or maybe in a lesser degree to that of the principal love.

I never understood why or how my love for her turned out the way it did then but, now, with so much more experience of life, I can say this for sure, for a man to be besotted over a woman for her looks or charms is wrong, it's a recipe for disaster. I mean, how can we trust someone with our hearts simply because we like the way they appear or the things they say.

When we give our hearts away to just anyone without knowing whether they are capable of this trust, we are placing ourselves at their beck and call and we would not be able to say or do otherwise to what they ask of us, even if what they want is wrong.

Tomorrow if they tell us to discard our parents, we would be forced to do so because we have given away our heart."

When he paused, my dad said: "Jaffar Bhai, what you saying is so true. I have seen this happen in so many marriages, men breaking ties with their own parents and brothers because of their wives. Some people even give their hearts to their children to the point where they would defend their children even if they are wrong. I know of this one father that hit another child and pushed him into a ditch because that child interfered with his child."

"*Kya karna*, (what can be done! A rhetoric question in Urdu) Goolam Bhai! Love is blind!" Jaffar Chacha

continued: "we will all behave in this manner if someone insults our beloved. This is yet another reason why our principal love should not be our spouses or children. We could end up doing wrong in their name. Now, from all of my experiences of life, I can say that our heart, the seat of love, is the key to our beings and the key to Allah. Now this is important and we need to be careful about whom we give our hearts too. A Sufie saying is coming to mind. It's too complex to quote, but the gist of it is that a Spiritual Guide just does not give his heart freely but he first tests for sincerity and dedication before he gives his heart. Such people of Allah are completely dedicated to love and when they give their hearts then they giving a boundless blessing that has no limits.

Shah Muhaddas Dehliwi, may Allah bless him, a Sufie Saint enumerates fifty different levels to love. My Spiritual Guide said: "man was created for the pain of the heart otherwise, what was short in the worship of the jinn and angels." Now, the angels worship perfectly and no matter how hard we try we will never be able to compete. The sweet pain of the heart is meaning love and this is what we are created for, this is the way; the highest rank in the eyes of our Lord is... lo-ooove." He dragged the word love and while doing this he looked at us all. "Love is the purpose of our creation" he went on, "Love is our goal, provided we get it right. We all, naturally, desire to love in the highest degree and I, or shall I say we, because my Doolhun too is like me in this

matter, we also love to love in the highest degree but it is not between us or it is not directed to our children but it is directed to our Creator and such a love is only fit for Him. The problem: We can never love someone completely if we do not meet them. So, how do we love Allah, whom we cannot see... My Doolhun and I, in terms of our principal love, made our Spiritual Guide the focus of our principal love and at first we just did this for the sake of Allah without understanding but we have grown to understand with time that this love for our Spiritual Guide as the principal love is based on solid religious grounds.

Firstly, in studying religious history one can easily conclude that Allah has always communicated to humanity through His chosen people, such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, peace be upon them all. For us ordinary people, there is no direct communication. It is always through His chosen ones. In the same vein, the way to loving Our Creator is therefore, not only to follow His chosen ones, but to also make them our principal love, for the sake of Allah. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, told his disciples that they would not believe until they loved him more than their parents, their children and all of humanity. Communication with our Creator is something we have to learn from His chosen ones and it starts off with loving them.

This is what Sufism is all about, loving the Spiritual Guide for the sake of Allah and there are lots of poems written about this. The opening chapter, of the greatest work of Sufism, The Mathnawi by Rumi, May Allah bless him, starts with love.

Secondly, the most important prayer of a Muslim, read in every cycle of prayer, which is the essence of, not just prayer but also, the Holy Quran, teaches that guidance is attained by following Allah's chosen people. It immediately thereafter, warns us that there will be many imposters that will try to misguide us for their own benefits."

What Jaffar Chacha is saying amounts to us controlling who we give our hearts too and it makes sense in that if we give our hearts to the wrong person then they have control over us and can even influence us down the wrong road. What's worse is that, although we can try to make our wife or child our principal love it can never blossom to be this great love because of the possible insincerity or the lack of understanding on their part. He is so right in saying that principal love belongs to our Creator only and our Creator has directed us to love His chosen ones.

Although controlling who we give our love too can be difficult, it is not impossible. I am relating this to what Jaffar Chacha said about our other desires, the greed for wealth, the greed to show off. Just as we need to

control these aspects, we also need to control who we give our hearts too. Jaffar Chacha managed to control his love when he stopped going to the pool because of the girl he was attracted too. I think it requires us to be aware of ourselves and our desires and who we give our hearts to. This keeps us in control of our lives, instead of someone else controlling us.

At the same time, experiencing love is a great thing and the safest way to experience this, as Jaffar Chacha is saying, is to love a man of Allah for the sake of Allah because they will never misuse the power they will have over us but instead make us better people and bring us closer to our creator.

Jaffar Chacha continued: "So when I was in the gutter, I had pleaded with my Creator to help me and guide me. At that point in my life, I did not know anything about following Allah's Chosen people such as a Spiritual Guide. My brother once talked about 'Sufism' which is all centred around the Spiritual Guide and I told him that I wanted to meet a man of Allah and become a disciple and so he introduced me to one.

At this point, I just trusted that it was what Allah wanted me to do and I became a disciple without even questioning or even knowing the name of my Spiritual Guide. I just took the plunge trusting Allah is guiding me to a man of His. I sort of talked to my Creator and told Him that I am doing this based on His trust. It was really

deep waters in that, it was beyond reason in the beginning but somehow the feelings were right. I hardly spoke to my Spiritual Guide but just became his disciple and, the one part of this process is to look into each others eyes.

The eyes tell a lot. I know and I am sure you too must have experienced seeing, fear, sorrow, uncertainty and so forth just by looking into people's eyes. His eyes were extraordinary, so intense, so deep. Something about them just won me over. I just knew he was true by looking so deeply into his eyes." This experience of mine reminds me of a poem written by Hazrath Amir Khusrau, May Allah be pleased with him. I want to just relate a few couplets of it.

You've taken away my looks, my identity, by just a **glance**.

By making me drink the wine of love-potion,
You've intoxicated me by just a **glance**;

My fair, delicate wrists with green bangles in them, have
been held tightly by you with just a **glance**.

I give my life to you, Oh my cloth-dyer,
You've dyed me in yourself, by just a **glance**.

I give my whole life to you Oh, Nijam,
You've made me your bride, by just a **glance**.

Oh Khusrau, the river of love
Runs in strange directions.
One who jumps into it drowns,
And one who drowns, gets across."

"Wah!" My father exclaimed with rapture. His intense tone stirred something deep within me.

Jaffar Chacha smiled and stretched out his hands with upturned palms, in a gesture of awe. "Subhan-Allah, all praise is due to Allah. If we really want to know about love then there is no better place to learn about it and experience it than that of the Spiritual Guide's gathering. Ah! The wine of love..."

He continued: "As we discussed earlier, principal love is all-consuming. They say Majnoo used to kiss Layla's dog everywhere based on his thoughts that perhaps Layla touched the dog here or maybe there."

"Leave alone Layla, even Layla's dog had complete control over him." Abdullah said and we all laughed uproariously at the absurdity of it all and yet... it was true. He was willing to go to hell for eternity, just for Layla's dog.

"This is principal love." Jaffar Chacha went on once we settled down. "In a Sufie poem it states that until you do not give up your life for the beloved, you have not fulfilled the CRITERIA of love. It is even more than this but these are not things we talk about openly.

I did not meet my Spiritual Guide again for at least the next six years of my life until after I was married to my Doolhun but during this time, I thought about him a lot. I was sincerely committed and this is what it takes to succeed in spirituality - determination and commitment no matter what.

What is important in this whole part of me finding a Spiritual Guide is that I was not using reason or logic but I was simply talking to my Creator and He never let me down. Allah, to me, is always close, always seeing, always listening, He knows every little thought of mine. Through my Spiritual Guide my faith was increased even more and through him I have come to know my Creator."

We all sat quietly for a bit, mulling everything over. I couldn't help thinking that I obviously didn't know what real love is. To be so besotted as to kiss my beloved's dog? What could possibly prompt such actions? And yet I know for a fact that the lover's of Rasullulah (final messenger of Allah), peace be upon him, would give their lives for him even though they had never met him before. Could I ever reach such a level of faith and love? How did the poem Jaffar Chacha shared with us go... "one has to drown to be saved"

After a beat, he went on, "As I said earlier on, Allah is not made up of anything we know of, such as water, fire, light or even energy. So too it is with our souls and

love. It makes sense that we therefore have to develop our spirituality and to love in order to truly know our Creator. So our marriage too, was and still is, an institution for us to grow our spirituality. It's about searching for and finding what is right and most importantly, implementing and imbibing what is right. Growing our spirituality also provided substance to our marriage and this makes our lives more interesting. My Doolhun and I, we can now spend hours in each others company, having a fruitful conversation.

Gold, diamonds and pearls are expensive because they are rare. Love for God... I just don't know if we can ever do it justice. Once I tried putting a price tag to this love. I thought of the value of this entire world but quickly realised even if we add an infinite number of worlds to it, love is still worth more. Burning in hell for it... heck! Even if I had to burn for eternity for this love, I think it would still be a small price to pay. I don't think I can put a price tag to this love.

So this love of the highest degree, it is not about me feeling nice but it is about serving You, the beloved. I surrender myself entirely to You. In this way, I no longer exist, but You do and if we ever reach such a level then we too become the object of love, we become the epicentre of love because we no longer exist in us, but Allah does.

I know that my Spiritual Guide is like this, he has given himself up to Allah and maybe one day, Allah willing, we too will be like this."

Ameen! Ameen! Ameen! I pleaded with my Creator in my head! I really wanted to strive on this path! I just know that it is far deeper than Jaffar Chacha has led on. His eyes seem to have so much deeper wisdom when he touched on this subject. It holds so many secrets. I wish I could unpack some more of his vast knowledge.

"When we give our hearts or our principal love to a spouse or a child, then only they matter. No one else matters. I will say it again, no one else matters. But when we give our hearts to a man of Allah, for the sake of Allah, then it's different, everyone matters. My Doolhun and I try to place our primary love in our Spiritual Guide for the sake of Allah but, on a secondary level we still love and care for each other and we also love our children and we also love others. Although our love in all these secondary cases is not of the first degree, it is far higher and better than those that love without making Allah their primary object of love because we understand the sacredness of love. We are applying it in a way that Allah wants us to apply our love which entails justice and doing what's right. Not making the wife or the children my principal love had lots of other benefits. Although I loved and cared for my Doolhun and the children, I still had control. I

would not spoil them or overlook the wrong they did or give in to all their demands. People call this tough love."

While Jaffar Chacha was talking I was thinking of a scenario; how would a person feel if their beloved had to be inconsiderate of their feelings and desires or how do they feel if their beloved had to ditch them. Just the thought of this scared me and sent shivers down my spine. So I think that it is for this reason too that Jaffar Chacha reserved his principal love, for a man of Allah, for the sake of Allah. They would never hurt anyone's heart because they know the sacredness and value of love.

"Loving my spiritual guide was not based on outer appearances or even the things he said." Jaffar Chacha continued. "It's difficult to explain but it's like loving him for his deep inner being, even beyond the noble values he stood for. Loving his core, his essence. Knowing someone's inner core is not some thing we can perceive with our physical senses or by using our rationale but these are things we feel deep within us. Yes, there were always those recurring doubts stemming from my cognitive mind to overcome... am I doing the right thing. And it didn't help that such aspects of the religion were completely foreign to me.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I simply had to take the plunge while trusting in my Creator. So I have come to learn with time that this knowing the core of

ourselves and others is another whole aspect of our beings and its only in recent times that I have come to realise that this is our spirituality, this is getting close to our Creator.

So with my Doolhun too, my love for her changes from level to level. I am now sensing her inner core which seems to have grown with time and I am beginning to love her for her essence too."

He paused briefly before saying: "Although you might appreciate what I am saying to a certain degree, true love is only something one fully appreciates when we walk the path and live it.

Doolhun, The Bride

There are two critical times in our children's life when we need to hold their hands and guide them, one when they are learning to walk and more importantly, the second, in teenage years, where we guide them to seek out the higher goals of life.

Chapter 15

"Ah, children" Jaffar Chacha said and his smile lit up his face. "The first two children came very easy. My Doolhun was all for it, the third was far more difficult and with every successive child it became increasingly more difficult for her to agree. I rarely forced an issue in our marriage. In this case too, I preferred explaining as to why we should have more children. It was very difficult to persuade her but thank Allah, we are blessed with six children. Frankly speaking, although it was a bit difficult for me in terms of finances to have more children, I knew that my contribution to the upbringing of children was negligible compared to hers.

She had to deal with the pain of childbirth; its like knowing that an operation is painful yet agreeing to get sick so that you go for an operation; really tough decision and that's not all; the sleepless nights, the added work of taking care of the A to Z needs of the child. I really do not know how she did it and I sincerely doubt that I would be able to do it if I was in her shoes. I

have grown to truly respect her and all such women for their emotional strength and seemingly unlimited endurance."

"Well said, Jaffar Bhai!" My dad commented: "It reminds me of a verse of the Holy Quran 46:15, which, after depicting the pains of childbirth, commands children to be good to their mothers."

"Jee Goolam Bhai, it's such a beautiful verse, one of my favourites!" Jaffar Chacha replied and went on to add: "Our Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has indicated to us to care for our mothers three times when asked and mentions the father on the fourth time. Allah is all just and fair. He has given the man preference when it comes to leadership of the family but He gives preference to mothers over fathers when it comes to who the children should care for first." Silence fell over our gathering for a short while. We were each lost in our own reverie, I was thinking that religious teachings and even nature serves to protect and treat the females special.

After what seemed like a lifetime Jaffar Chacha continued: "For me, as I said, it was far easier to have more children because the work load was not on me. It was difficult with the finances but I believed that Allah is the Provider and He would take care of our needs. Two children was enough for me too, but my religion encourages us to have children, so I wanted more. It

was not about what we want but it is about what our religion teaches. Having one or two children is far easier, it's what we want, but having more takes sacrifices and here too, my Doolhun made sacrifices. This is the test of faith, to submit even if it does not appeal to us. *Shukar* (thanks) to Allah, we hadn't stopped at two. Our children are all so special to us. *Alhamdulillah* (all praise is due to Allah)!"

"Children too, reminds me again of the chapter of the Holy Quran called Surah Al Imraan." My father gave his input. "From what I gathered it's all about family and children. Imraan and his wife were ordinary people, well not prophets. His wife prayed for a good child and in the process of speaking to Allah, she vowed to put her child into His service. They were blessed with a pious child, Mother Mary or Bibi Mariam (Allah be pleased with her) as we Muslims know her."

"Indeed Goolam Bhair, the mothers role is so much more important than the fathers and the success of children and the family as a whole depends more on the mother than the father

"So too, it was for us. Wanting children was not so much about fulfilling our desires but it was more about following our religion and having good children that would submit to Allah and please Him. '*Insha-Allah*.' (Allah willing).

Come to think of it, there is no way that we would have had six children had I not sorted out our issues in early marriage by getting my Doolhun to follow my lead according to our religion. So I did my part too.

Having more than two children was against the norm of society at that time too and societies arguments of overpopulation affecting the environment made sense. But I just recently have come to realise that it's not the population that's the problem, but it is the way we live our lives that makes the difference. In my father's generation they had many children but they lived in a very environmentally friendly way, by occupying less space, not being extravagant, handing down clothing and so forth.

Today our houses are huge with just a few people living in them, we have cupboards full of shoes and clothing, everyone has a car, we are eating extravagantly and so forth. All this is at the expense of our environment. I would say that a person of today exploits the environment far more than ten people of previous generations. So it's not overpopulation that is the culprit, but it is materialism that is ruining our environment."

And just like that, my mind went down a new avenue of thought processing. In my research, I have come across the term 'ecological footprint' which is about the individuals impact on the environment. Jaffar Chacha

was basically explaining the same concept in a more practical way.

Then again this is societies problem today. We talk about our environment. We have days to honour our parents and days to honour women but the reality is that these are just superficial, sugar-coated words with no action to back them up. On the contrary, these are the places were we are completely lacking today. Religion does it so simply without the deceptive marketing.

"Rearing children is hard work and it means making sacrifices but, in the long run, it has its boons." Jaffar Chacha went on. "The biggest of which is that children from bigger families end up being people that can actually get along with others better, they are more caring and are therefore more successful at relationships. These are just not my views only but such findings are from recent studies too. Oxford University recently did a study and found that children from large families were better at socialising."

"No parent wants to experience their child having marital problems." My father said to him.

"That thought scares me." Jaffar Chacha replied. "I suppose it is so because a child does not get all the attention in a large family. They have to learn that life is not cantered around them which results in them being well adjusted and secure in that they are not seeking or

depending on the approval or attention of others to live life happily. But I suppose this is not the only factor and there are exceptions.

What we do on the outside is not as important as what we are on the inside. Our core, our essence, our souls is what really matters. So this is why we've never pushed our children in any direction that suited us, such as, to excel at school or to pray either. Instead we advised them and allowed them to make their own choices based on their conscience. They have to learn to think independently, to weigh situations and to make their own decisions. The best we could do for them was to give them the best of religious knowledge and always pray that Allah guides them.

Obviously there were certain boundaries that we could not allow them to cross such as alcohol, drugs, disrespect, dressing up provocatively and so forth. We would like them to follow a religious path but even this, we did not enforce on them.

Yes it is so scary to let go of children to do what they want but somehow we managed to contain our fears and allow them the maximum freedom. However, with daughters it was different, they are more prone to abuse, so we were more careful with them. Instead of us teaching our children to focus only on grades and careers, we tried to teach them habits that will enable them to grow spiritually. Spirituality is the deeper part

of our religion. Now, that's a tall order for people like us who were still trying to figure spirituality out for ourselves, but we intuitively did our best.

We felt it unnecessary to devote so much time towards careers and earning so we never pushed our children in that direction. One way or the other everyone survives. Over and above this, success in finances is not about how much we have but it is about how wisely we use it. With some people, no matter how much they have, it's never enough because their expectations and standards of living is constantly increasing. We were just content with whatever we had and we had no ambitions for anything in this department and this is what we were trying to teach our children and others."

"We met your second son, Jaffar Chacha!" Abdullah said.

"Yes, yes, what a good, humble young man!" My father said. "Our car broke down on a trip to Durban a few years back. He had stopped to assist us. I hadn't realised who he was till we got talking and he mentioned you."

"Ah yes, that must have been Abbaas." Jaffar Chacha replied. "I vaguely recall him mentioning the incident."

"And remember the hitchhiker you picked up, Abba (father)?" I asked my father.

Abdullah burst out laughing, "Abba, that scary looking one! He sat in the back with us! He was staring at us like

he wanted to eat us up! Remember how Ahmed wet his pants!"

"I did not!" I gave my brother a playful shove and after everyone's laughter died down I asked Jaffar Chacha about how he taught religion to his children. He replied."

"We've never forced them to pray because we do not want them to be ritualistic. It's pointless them praying ritualistically while they do not care about others. It's pointless them praying because we push them to. They must want to do it from their hearts. To us loving and caring for others is the more important part of our religion because this is a part of faith and having faith is what our Creator wants us to have.

We have never spoilt our children and even if we wanted too, we could not, because we always lived on a tight budget. I had plenty of opportunities to earn more but I preferred to spend my energies on pursuing religion and figuring out what life is all about.

When our last child was born after much wrangling, I asked my Doolhun to imagine not having this child. She could not, the thought scared her. All our children are precious to us and we cannot imagine life without any one of them. Yes, it's hard work! Yes, it's worries when they are ill or late coming home! But it's worthwhile.

Both our sons are married, with children and they live with us. We like this living together, the grandchildren are fun, but at the same time, we do not force our sons to live with us. I tell my sons that if they want to get a place of their own, they are welcome too. At the same time I advise them that getting a place of their own means that they have to work for it. I ask them if its worth it to strive all their lives to build a house that they are going to leave behind any way. I advise them that they must rather enjoy life and use the time to understand why we here on earth and try to fulfil that purpose.

The down side, I don't know if I can really call it a downside, we live tightly space-wise for now, but this is also good in a way. This is how my Doolhun and I have always lived. We lived with my parents and three other brothers with their families and space was always tight but once we learnt to make do then it was more than enough. On the other hand, had we not learnt to make do then no matter how much of space we would have had, it would not have been enough.

Over and above this, living together with many people allowed us the opportunity of building closer relationships with far more people. Unity is not the only advantage of living this way but also security, especially in a country like ours, where crime is out of control. The more people living together the safer it becomes and, its far cheaper.

I know a lot of people that put a lot of time and resources into building huge houses with plenty of space for their children but the children eventually leave and this breaks the parents hearts. So I also tell my Doolhun not to bank on our sons living with us because if this does not work out, it's going to hurt her. Why put ourselves at the mercy of others?! Why try to control that which is not in our hands?!

To our daughters, we always advise them to listen to their husbands and to be good to their in laws. Why limit our relationships?! The more relationships of love, the better."

All that was being said put me in a very deep and intense mind space. I reflected on my own character: am I a kind, considerate person that would go out of my way for others. If everyone was kind and considerate, life on earth would be wonderful. I think this is the solution to all the problems that we are facing in our world today; instead of focusing on materialism we need to rather focus on building relationships of love. His one saying on materialism caps it all, one way or the other everyone goes through life, so why make such a fuss over careers, earning and houses.

Doolhun, The Bride

Our spiritual natures and our physical bodies are at odds. For our physical health and well-being we go to great lengths, alas, eventually losing both. Religion teaches us to strive towards our spiritual natures, by controlling our physical needs, being balanced, so that we eventually benefitting both.

Chapter 16

"As you would have noticed by now, my Doolhun and I strived towards a religious way of life instead of a worldly way. This was not easy for us because religion has been downplayed by the media controlled by the materialistic powers of the world today under the disguise of democracy and freedom.

Nay, it's worse. They teach us to look down on religion. Religious people are portrayed as backward, ignorant and violent people. I remember this movie 'Midnight Express' - as this guy was suffering in prison the Azaan (Muslim call to prayer recited over loudspeaker from all mosques) goes in the background, subtly giving off the message that all this suffering that this person was going through was because of Islam. Another movie, 'Taxi' I think it was named, a Muslim dad is portrayed as a monster and the reason for his daughter wanting to commit suicide simply because he was trying to protect her."

Jaffar Chacha paused holding up his hands, shrugging his shoulders and his mouth in a grimace as an expression of questioning.

"The French parliament banned a scarf which is against the teaching and practice of Muslims. Moves are afoot to ban religious symbols, such as wearing a cross, in the work place."

My father inputted. "In contrast, at one time, not too long ago, there used to be government sensor boards that clamped down on pornographic material. There were strict laws, such as the death penalty, in place for murder. Homosexuality was a criminal offence, even in America, but today, all of this is allowed and even encouraged."

"The question then arises: is this democracy and freedom, encouraging wrong under the banner of freedom whilst discouraging religion and spirituality."

Jaffar Chacha replied. "Apart from its devious media campaign, democratic countries readily resort to wars to subjugate and destroy any other system of governance. They consider communist countries and countries ruled by Islamic law as something that they have to change."

"How can enforcing ones way onto another be called freedom?" I thought out loud.

"These materialistic people that rule our world today are the epitome of evilness, Ahmed Ali. They made sure that North and South Korea are at odds. They made sure that China and Taiwan are at odds. They made sure that Russia and Ukraine are at odds and so too it is with

Saudi Arabia and Yemen. If they can incite a war, then they have succeeded in keeping these growing powers in check without getting their hands dirty. All while making a huge profit with arms deals on the side. Its all about money, power and resources. Is this freedom of choice and democracy for all? Is this happiness for all or is it all about trying to satisfy our unquenchable greed for this world."

What Jaffar Chacha was saying was undoubtedly true. I, myself have come across crazy studies which prove that the wealth of the world is in the hands of a handful of wealthy men. These few men own more than what half the population of the world own combined.

"My Doolhun and I, we have learnt with time, that there is no greater knowledge than religion. It's far greater than all that we study in our schools and universities, even greater than science. Basic teachings, right from hygiene to burying our dead and even governance, all have their roots in religion. It goes much deeper. It not only teaches us how to live in a way that will grant us happiness but it also liberates us from our worldly desires by teaching us about how to better ourselves and how to behave in an upright manner in society and it teaches us about our spiritual natures so that we feel and experience so much more." He continued, "To us, prayer is not just about praying to keep a clean sheet with no missed prayers or something to appease our conscience but, it is something that must make a

difference to us. It must make us better people and improve the quality of our lives. It must strengthen our souls and give us enlightenment and above all bring us closer to our Creator. You see, Allah is free of all needs and wants. He does not need us to pray to Him but, what He wants from us, is that we grow ourselves to become spiritually enlightened people and to love. This is the purpose of life. In our mother's wombs and in early childhood we grew physically and mentally but later we have to grow spiritually in order to become the highest of creation that Allah has destined us to be."

While Jaffar Chacha was talking, a different picture of religion was gradually forming in my mind. I was beginning to realise that religion is not about ritualistic prayer alone but it also has a lot to offer in terms of knowledge, which, if we use could help us to live better lives and help us develop into better people.

Then, regarding love, religion adds so much more to it. It's not just about gratifying our carnal desires and a physical attraction towards the opposite sex but it is about seeing and bringing about the good, the nobility, the perfection that is latent in all of us.

Jaffar Chacha continued; "There is no end to learning. One would think that a person that prays a lot is what any religion would hold in the highest of esteem, yet in Islam, a knowledgeable person has a higher rank by a great degree. His sleeping is better than the prayer of a

person that prays. By any standards, this is a great teaching.

Loving for the sake of Allah ranks even higher. Its the highest state that we can achieve. According to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, on the Day of Judgment, even Prophets would envy people who love without having any connections to the people they love and they love for the sake of Allah. This too, by any standard, is a great teaching." Jaffar Chacha looked at each one of us so as to emphasise and allow this to sink in. "So, how then is religion portrayed so badly by this so called educated, modern way?"

Jaffar Chacha was reminding me about how this glitzy modern way was affecting Muslims today and people of other faiths. We have become Muslims by name only because in practice we are following their ways of materialism which appeals to our worldly desires.

After a brief pause, Jaffar Chacha continued: "A major part of spirituality is to do service to humanity. In my case, I was involved in a religious organization founded by my Spiritual Guide. I am serving Allah: easy to see, easy to understand, easy to do. But, just how does a woman fit in?! Or how does she do service to humanity when she does not have freedom like men do. I could not understand this and therefore could not guide my Doolhun in this department.

Here too, it is in things that most women of today look down upon. Its in being a good housewife, a good mother, a good daughter, a good daughter in law, and a good mother in law. She figured all this out herself. To me, the role of a woman, in terms of serving Allah is far greater and harder than that of a man and it comes with no recognition whatsoever. An example to illustrate this; we have a weekly prayer on a Thursday and my bride had a turn once in three weeks to prepare meals for fifty people. She is a wonderful cook, really tasty food. While we prayed for about an hour she would spend the whole day preparing the meal. You be the judge, who has contributed more to the prayer. Allah is absolutely just. If her intentions are to serve others for the sake of Allah, then her cooking achieves far more than our prayer.

Had my Doolhun not turned out to be the person she is, then I definitely would not have had the opportunity of serving towards the uplifting of society because I would have been too preoccupied with trying to solve problems at home. Without a stable home one cannot achieve anything and she gave me this. I always wondered why all the Prophets were men. Why were there no women? Now I understand; their service is for Allah only without getting any recognition whatsoever. The Holy Quran does not talk much of them either but whatever little there is, it's of the highest praise. There is a verse that states that Allah has set the example of Mother Mary and Asia, peace be upon them both, as

examples to all of humanity. Not just women but all of humanity. Then the chapter called 'Al Imraan'. Its called Al Imraan but this chapter has more to say about his wife than him. She was the mother of Mary, peace be upon them, what a pious woman. I suppose it boils down to team work. We were instrumental in bringing out the good in each other, I set the goals and she provided me with a solid foundation and a base to aspire towards greater heights in doing social work.

You see, being good to others is a part of faith and faith is more important than prayer. Once someone asked the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, what is the condition of a woman that prays all the time but she is bad to her neighbour. He said that she will be in hell and when he was asked about a woman that does not pray all that much but is good to her neighbours he replied, she will be in heaven.

My Doolhun befriended an elderly neighbour of ours, a widow with no children. They became so close that our neighbour would share her innermost feelings and thoughts and I am pretty certain that she did not share this with anyone else, not just because they were of a personal nature, but because she was admitting that she messed up her life. She sort comfort in my Doolhun. This is the compassion that only a woman can have provided she can open herself up to everyone.

My Doolhun made time for everyone. She became the light and pride of our home. Without her I don't think anyone would bother with me. Even my spiritual guide's son got along better with her than with me." Jaffar Chacha had this sheepish grin on his face while he rubbed his slightly bowed head. "I am scratching my head now because I am beginning to realise just how horrible my communication with others is.

Just last week I handled one situation very, very badly even after she told me to handle things coolly. I call a broom a broom - I have no diplomacy. Now that I am thinking about this so deeply. I just cannot see myself finding a solution for my PR side anytime soon but I am going to try."

Almost as an after thought he added, "Then again, maybe not. The world needs people like me too. The good thing I notice is that whenever I have these tight situations with people, our relationship improves in the long run, as it was with my bride. These are things that grow our spirituality. I cannot see wrong and let it go. I have to try to put it right. This is striving for good and it holds a lofty status in Islam."

" Jaffar Bhai, Thora diplomacy rehna (urdu- you must have a little diplomacy)!" My father said mischievously.

At that moment, I saw just how close they were. Even though they did not meet often, they had a shared understanding and my father was able to be completely honest with him without fear of offending him. I hoped to have such a strong friendship some day.

Jaffar Chacha's laugh echoed through the bare land that surrounded us. It was so contagious that even though Abdullah and I did not quite fully understand the humour, we couldn't help but join in. We settled down again and he continued with his story.

"Our Spiritual Guide taught that even if someone brought you two blades of grass, accept it and appreciate it. My Doolhun did a lot for me, so much so, that I cannot repay her even if I tried. All I can do is pray for her and although I feel that it is not much, I also know that it is the best thing I can do for her. We do not realise it but a prayer from the heart is a huge thing. I am not telling you all this for money, name or show but I am saying all this because so many of the young couples of today are ending up divorced. I want to present a realistic view on life, love and marriage. One that is not idealistic and sugar-coated. Perhaps my story can teach people to have patience and work through their problems no matter how difficult it may seem at that moment because this is the way that produces the best end result.

Look we all sin and make mistakes when we are put to trial, but if we correct ourselves and conquer this trial, then we have learnt valuable lessons and can move up to the next level of life. Ignoring our mistakes or sins is no solution. It's like being stuck in grade one for the rest of our lives. We simply have to understand why we are here on earth and fulfil this mission. My Doolhun and I made many mistakes and probably will make many more, but we are learning and getting better at overcoming the trials that life throws at us."

Humble yourself.

You will grow greater than the world .

Your self will be revealed to you, with you.

Hazrath Moulana Jalaaluddin Rumi RA.

Doolhun, The Bride.

If you looking for faults in something then you would find faults in it no matter how perfect it is. Some people even find faults in the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, back then and even now. Finding faults is all too easy but realising our own faults is almost impossible. Most importantly, finding faults in someone else does not bear any fruits but causes us harm while realising our own faults is the herald of great blessings in that it affords us the opportunity of improving.

Chapter 17

"I know it's getting really late" Jaffar Chacha said: "but if you want me to continue then there is not much left to say about my Doolhun and I. All that's left to tell is about how we are at present."

"Please continue Jaffar Chacha. It's very interesting and there is no way that we going to leave you with a story half told."

Jaffar Chacha continued: "Some religions call it 'karma', some say what you reap is what you sow, some say your eventual outcome is according to the things you do, some say, what goes around, comes around. Man, there must be good reasons for all these people of different cultures, at different times, through the ages, to say this.

From my observations, this is so true. So many people suffer towards the end of their lives because of the poor choices they made or because they followed the wrong way. No one will tell you that they messed up their lives because it is just too embarrassing to them. Some of them, on the contrary would even put up a happy front or try to highlight some small good in their lives to hide their grief and save face.

So as I come to the end of our story it is fitting for me to tell you a little about our outcome. Look, as much as I would like you to heed, or at least consider the lessons I am talking about, I am not going to white wash things like the way most people do today. I will say it as it is.

My Doolhun and I, we are at a ripe age now, the golden years of our lives. In terms of health, we are not like how we used to be ten years ago: diabetes, hypertension, failing eyesight, aches and pains.... There is nothing we could have done to avoid any of this, it's normal. What's important however is the outcome of the things that we did have control over.

When you get to our age then you too would realise that we simply have to live by the choices we made because there is not much we can do to change things at this juncture of our lives. We are reaping the fruits of the seeds we planted years ago. We do not have the health, strength or time to start afresh. There is only one shot at life, and ours is almost done: there is no going back.

I would be lying to you if I told you that our lives was, and is perfect right now: maybe it is, but you know how we human beings are. When it's hot we complain and when it's cold we complain. And of course we still going through trials.

Why, just yesterday, I was up early and I remember seeing my Doolhun making the shopping list. I forgot about this and continued with my day; a busy one; was not concentrating on writing, so I went out into the garden to do something physical, something different so as to get my concentration back. Spent the entire day and finally got back into the house at six in the evening, very tired and feeling slightly hungry too. Just as I sat down to get my breadth back, she gives me the list. She had the whole day to do this but chose to do it at the end of the day which meant that I had to get it done immediately. On top of that she has fish fingers and chicken strips on the list which she needs for the grandchildren's lunch pack for the morning. These items are from the butcher shop which closed at five.

Had she done this to me ten years ago I would have definitely blown a fuse there and then. Now, I have a little more patience so I calmly took the list without saying anything and left for the shop. I was slightly upset and had to suppress my anger. Can it get any worse? Anyway, got down to the supermarket and even managed to get the fish fingers at an exorbitant price. Things were looking up, seems like I will get through this without blowing up.

On my return trip, as I got to the top of the hill the bike stalled. You paying attention...., I found this really interesting. I was having a problem with a leaky petrol tank so I keep a reserve; topped up my petrol and while rolling home tried to kick start the bike. As I got to the gate it stalled again. Now I needed the bike running to climb the driveway. Ah! maybe I did not fill enough petrol, so I put more and tried kick starting it down another hill away from home.

After two or three tries I was beginning to lose control of my anger. Ended up stuck at the bottom of the valley. Now I had to carry all the groceries and march back home, some one hundred meters away, all uphill. I was angrily mumbling, chicken strips, fish fingers. I dropped off the stuff and got my sons to help me push the bike up again. I hate to say what I thought off at one point but I am going to say it because it shows how incorrectly we can think and behave under pressure. I was thinking of telling her, are you pushing me for the second

divorce? May Allah forgive me for such evil thoughts. Although I know how sacred marriage is, I was still having such thoughts. O Allah: Please forgive me for these stupid thoughts."

"Shew, that test sounds really scary Jaffar Chacha," Abdullah said softly, "I don't think I could handle that," and while saying this he lowered his head and put both his hands on top of his head as if to hide.

"This is the reality of life," Jaffar Chacha continued: "It's full of trials". In the short pause that followed I was thinking about how complicated this test was...

Jaffar Chacha was softly saying: "Anyhow I angrily told her, in disgusting language, how difficult she made things for me and she repeatedly apologised. That's one more excellent quality of my Doolhun, when I am upset she never flares up to make things worse. I think I am also like that. After all that ranting I was still fuming and I thought that I would never cool off, it was really bad. Bad. Then I remembered: the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, had said that the thing the devil likes best is to sow discord between a husband and wife. It's amazing; I cooled down immediately. Its the first for me, to cool off so suddenly. I think it's a good breakthrough.

If the devil likes sowing discord between the husband and wife best then I can assure you that this causes the

most harm to us and if we make our marriages work, then we cause the most harm to him.

As soon as I cooled off, I apologised to her. In our early marriage, when we had an argument, it would last for days but now it's just for a few minutes. *Alhamdulillah*. (All praise is due to Allah).

My behaviour was disgusting and what made it even worse was that I later learnt that she was not well and that is why she forgot to give me the list earlier. I have been trying for so long to have control over my anger which stems from our carnal desires and I hope that I am reaching the end of this battle. When the fire reaches the end of the stick it gets brighter before it dies. Well I hope that this is not just wishful thinking but it is the devil's last, last tries with me or us.

When I related this to my friend that evening he told me a story in return. The devil took some jam and spread it on the wall. That's all he did but look what happens. Ants were attracted to the jam, then a lizard was attracted to the ants and then the house cat moved into the action followed by the neighbour's dog injuring the cat and finally the neighbours fighting.

By the way, the bike was not short of petrol. It's a new problem, the petrol tap jammed, not allowing the petrol to flow to the carburettor. At what a crucial point this had to happen. So many different bits all coming

together to really drive me up the wall. What a test. Although I lost some points, I think I won on the whole but I still need to work on my anger.

Moving on: Well you would have gathered by now that our lives was based on seeking Allah by following our conscience, by curbing our urges or carnal desires, by following our Spiritual Guide, by pleasing and taking care of our parents, by serving and helping others. These were our main goals. It was not easy or glitzy but it was hard work and it entailed making lots and lots of sacrifices."

Meanwhile, I was thinking that Jaffar Charcha's story was really giving us some excellent insights into life. A lovely blend that derives the best of both ends; having a fixed goal of wanting to know our Creator yet also allowing us the opportunities of exploring, pondering and experiencing; a real adventure. I never thought of religion like this but instead thought of it as just boring rules and ritualistic prayer. Also, from what my dad talked about, I know that 'Sufism' or 'tasawaff' (Spirituality) has a lot more which Jaffar Chacha has not touched on. I suppose he is leaving those parts for us to experience.

Jaffar Chacha was continuing with his narrative: "In terms of materialism, my Doolhun and I achieved very little. We never bought a house but lived in what was handed down to us and we hardly made changes to it

even when it came to furnishing. We never bought on credit after our episode with credit and we tried not to be extravagant. At present, we own very little, we have no savings but we short of nothing. We live with our children and although I haven't been earning for a while I still do my bit by running around to get all our daily requirements for the kitchen. Its teamwork, earning is now my children's division, mine, to fill in the gaps.

Although my Doolhun and I share so many interests now, such as religion and spirituality and although we do so many things together we also spend a lot of time pursuing our own interests and in some things we have our own views. As an example she is an anti vax while I do not have a problem to take it or not too, either way we going to die. She sleeps on a double bed like a queen while I hit the floor. Her tastes on social media is completely different to mine. The point, we do not force our views on one another in things that are not so important.

As to children, we have good relationships with our adult, married children and sometimes we spend hours chatting and even doing lots of different things together. We pray together, we sit in our religious organisation's meetings together, we play music together in our brigade, we go out together, they help me with my writing by editing and giving me feedbacks, we solve problems together, I take walks with them, I sing religious songs with them and once I even did a

journalism course with my eldest daughter. We were both students in the same class and she ended up with a better pass than me. We really enjoy all of this, it makes me feel like I am, just not wanted, but also appreciated, respected and loved.

May the Almighty, by the mention of His chosen ones, grant them strong faith and fortitude especially in trials. Amen.

As for the grandchildren, what a racket they make when they are all together, I just want to take cover but when they are not around I miss them. Got upset a few times with the noise and crying in the beginning but I have adjusted now, they need to do this, playing is important for their healthy growth. I am now even enjoying their racket.

Although we have these good times with our children and grandchildren, don't think of it as being idealistic. We do have problems now and again but on the whole we do not have major problems that could break our hearts. However we are also realistic. Life can change in the blink of an eye but because we are prepared to handle anything that comes our way and because we are not hung up on anything, I think that we would be able to handle these changes better. Sickness, death, loss its all a part of life and we have to handle them when the time comes.

As for my Doolhun, I grow closer to her each day and sometimes this closeness scares me. I enjoy spending time with her, she is a part of me and I think I am a part of her. I think we reaching the point of being one.

One.....? This is important, very important. To a Muslim this should be everything. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, strived to bring an entire country of people together and he did. It's not only about being one with the people around us but it's also about being one with our Creator. The Holy Quran teaches that Allah is closer to us than our jugular vein, we have to imbibe the qualities of caring and mercy unto others especially so as to be one with our Creator, we have to be one with the people around us to be one with our Creator.

I want to say a little more about 'not being hung up on things' and going with the flow of life without having any desires except knowing and pleasing our Creator. Happiness, peace and contentment is not out there but it is within us. When we are in tune with our Creator and all those around us then we will learn to be in tune with ourselves. We are in control of somethings of our lives and when we control these things to match with the broader scheme of things then life is so much better, it is like swimming with the current as opposed to, swimming against it.

In terms of knowing Allah, I think we have progressed a lot but at the same time we know that there is no end to spiritual growth and we would never be anywhere near the likes of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him or my Spiritual Guide for that matter, but try we must. To me, I think that it is only through our spiritual natures that we will be able to know Allah best and it is for this reason that we need to develop our spirituality. Allah is not physical in His essence but spiritual.

From the experiences with my Spiritual Guide, I know for certain that Allah sees me all the time, He knows every thought of mine and He is all powerful. Just one of many examples to illustrate this. Once on a visit to my guide, I was sleeping in the room adjacent to his. He communicated to me without words, it was like thoughts popping up in my mind. What would you like to eat and I, after a few times saying anything, finally settled for fish.

The next meal was what I had asked for, fish. I did not think too much about it then but, much later I realised that our level off communication was far beyond even the words popping up in my mind. Somewhere in my mind, I unconsciously had a particular piece of fish in mind, one that I really enjoyed at some time in my life: the colour, shape, taste, texture.... What was served, was exactly the piece of fish that I had eaten sometimes in my life.

This is one very small example of how my beloved, my primary love, a man of Allah treats me. Yes, he is not shy to correct me for any wrong steps I take but he does it so gently and I also know him to roll out the red carpet for me. He makes me feel like I am the most exalted person on earth.

From this experience of the fish, I am one hundred percent certain that Allah sees me all the time and knows every little hidden thought of mine.

Maybe, one day, by God's Grace, we too can be a little like our Spiritual Guide, bringing light to people's hearts and lives. I know that it's a far fetched dream, and I know that our time is running out, but you never know. Actually, becoming a beacon of light and we being the centre of love, if we get to do this, is not something that I strive towards and if it comes to be, then it is by His push. Serving and loving my Spiritual Guide is what I like best because it comes with great personal feelings of joy, to love is beautiful. But then again, maybe others loving me, like the way we love our guide, might just turn out to be good too.

In life, things can change in the blink of an eye and things will change for us too in the future. I pray that it is for the better, if not, then I pray that Allah grants us the patience to endure our losses. Now that my Doolhun and I are in the latter days of our lives, the fruits we are reaping are good. We do not have regrets,

we are content, our children and grandchildren bring us great joy.

Sorry, we do have regrets such as the wrong we did in our youth but because we sought and are still seeking pardon and because we mended our ways we know that Allah is most Merciful and we have hope that He would forgive us in the hereafter too. One other regret, we tried our best in serving Allah by serving our Spiritual Guide, our parents and family but we still wish that we could have done it better.

I know that Islam teaches us to hide our good deeds and not talk about them but I have done a lot of this by way of my talks but I do it not to show off and brag but I am saying all this so that I can inspire you to follow a more meaningful path in life and not just follow your carnal dictates, chasing this world. May Allah forgive me if I have done wrong. Amen.

My Doolhun and I, we have come to see, by observing others, that when you strive to fulfil your worldly desires it seems like a great achievement when you are young but as you get older things just go wrong. The fruits are bitter. We spent our youths, as I have already described to you, in some hardships, toil, uncertainty and tears for our cherished goals of serving others but in our old age the fruits are sweet. We are happy and", while holding his branded blanket up Jaffar Chacha broadly smiled and said: "I am still using my Vichasi

twenty five years down the line." Well; that's it. thanks so much for listening."

My dad said: "thank you Jaffar Bhai for sharing your life experiences. It's really fascinating and inspiring. I am quite certain that it would motivate and help my children and I to live better lives."

Jaffar Chacha said: "boys you not going to have the exact same trials and experiences that I have had. You most likely going to face a completely different situation and you may have to come up with your own unique solutions but there are some basic lessons that we can apply. Have a clean heart, be true to ourselves, never overlook our conscience, this is like lying to ourselves. We have to try to see the good in others while looking for the faults in ourselves. We have to try to understand why we behave in the way we do so that we can improve on ourselves. We have to strive to serve others and build relationships and never do things that will break relationships. Having good relationships and love is an important part of faith. We must always follow our religion and most importantly we must ask our Creator to help and guide us on the path of rectitude by following his chosen ones and to save us from all those who mislead and no matter how difficult it is we must not give up. Basically, make our Creator our goal and object of life." He paused and while looking at us, he asked: "does this make sense."

"Jee," Jaffar Chacha we replied. "*Insha-Allah* (Allah willing) we will try." Jaffar Chacha and my dad replied in unison: "*Insha-Allah*."

There is just one more thing I want to say to sum it all up" and when we nodded he said: "The Heart is a sacred place..., very sacred..., my Doolhun and I, we have spent our lives, as I have told you in trying to please others, especially those that are closest to us. We learnt that only those who tread carefully in the realm of hearts would be given the keys to The Heart of hearts and if ever we win a spot in This Heart, may our prayer always be for the well being of others. Amen."

Jaffar chacha, very softly and emotionally continued: "In Love we strive and we will succeed, in Love we seek and we shall find, in Love we desire and we will be fulfilled, in Love we die and forever will live. *Insha-Allah*, Allah willing."

As I drifted off to sleep that night, I remembered my commitment to pray Sura Al Fatiha and after praising Allah, I prayed that Allah guides me on the path of rectitude, the path of His chosen ones and to save me from those that misguide....
Amen.

The end.

This novel was a part of the theme for the 2022 KZN Juloos Meelad to foster good relationships and love. Check out our website for the covering article and a song (naath) on this theme.

<https://anjumanwm.co.za/human-interaction/>