

INTIMATE WITH GOD

A personal Narrative by a Survivor of Terrorist Attack on May 28, 2010 in Baitul Nur Mosque, Model Town, Lahore, Pakistan

The 28th of May was a hot and dusty day. It is my routine to leave home for the *Juma Prayers* at 12:55 pm. That day due to various commitments I got late and my father-in-law said “should we go?” in other words suggesting tentatively that we may not go. But we then decided to go. We therefore started late and reached Baitul Nur Mosque, Model Town five minutes later than usual. It is always my endeavor to find a place in the main front hall preferably in the front rows. That day since we had reached late, therefore I found a place in the last row just next to the central entrance opening into the rear corridor. My father-in-law went to the rear upper hall. A few minutes into the *Khutba*, I heard the sound of gun fire. After some initial commotion, people settled down. I thought that the security people posted at the gate will be able to control the situation. But some time later when the sound came closer, louder and more persistent, I got worried. However, I hoped that the police would be able to react and it would be a matter of time before the situation is brought under control. To my utter disbelief, the firing did not subside. Instead I heard a few loud explosions and then after laps of a few seconds firing was heard from the court yard of the Mosque. My level of worry and anxiety increased. I thought that probably the attackers were too many and some have managed to penetrate the security curtain. At that time people sitting outside the hall on chairs had been moved in and all the doors were bolted from inside. At that same time the people sitting in the main hall started trickling out of it, and into the basement. And then, some body started firing into the main hall through the windows. From the pattern of fire I concluded that there are two people who are firing. The bullets started hitting the people who were in the line of fire, most of whom were elderly people who being less agile could not move or take cover quickly. In matters of minutes the main hall started looking empty but bloody. Only the injured, the elderly or a few young able bodied persons now remained in the hall. And all of them were crouching by the walls. Most of the bullets were tracer rounds and the ricocheting bullets

created the feeling as if the dance of the death is being performed. I had taken cover behind the wall but kept my head up to have some view of the happenings. One attacker tried a number of times to force the entry from the side wooden door in the front. But he could not do so, because two or three very courageous people foiled that attempt by putting their entire weight behind that door. I saw one of them dying gallantly in front of that door and his body slumped there thus blocking it effectively. The attacker then abandoned the effort to force his entry through that door and came towards the rear door with glass pans. He tried to force it open by firing through it, but did not succeed. He then went back towards the front again and started firing through various windows. Every time he would fire through the window at random he would hit some one. Thus he continued to inflict casualties with impunity. One thing which I noticed was that upon being hit by the bullet, people would neither wail nor cry. They all took the hits and suffered the agonizing pain with remarkable forbearance. This in my opinion is reflective of their conviction and steadfastness of faith.

The same attacker then came towards the rear door, squat 15 feet away from it in my full view and started changing magazines and also took out two hand grenades. I also observed that he had blood on his trouser which was probably due to an injury caused to him in the fire fight outside the mosque. He was preparing for further damage in a very deliberate and cold manner. I watched in utter helplessness and horror for over three minutes. He was a sitting duck of a target, but none of us had any weapon.

When the attacker was making these preparations, I started evolving various plans in my mind. My first idea was that if the grenade falls close to me and I have enough time to react, I will lob it back at him and the second was to dash away from it, in case I can not lob it back. So when he lobbed the first grenade in the corridor, it came to rest towards my feet, and I was therefore unable to pick it up and throw it back, as I was lying flat with my hands and head away from it . Therefore I chose to dash away towards the northern wall, I had gone a few feet when it exploded and Gen Nasir took the full brunt of the blast on his face and chest and Wing Commander A was hit on his thighs and feet.

The same attacker then forced his entry into rear upper hall and started shooting at the people there. After some time he came towards the main hall, stood near the railing and lobbed a grenade, which exploded in the centre of the hall and caused a wound to my right foot. Then he fired thrice on a person sitting at the entrance. I saw the man fall to a side and lay motionless. At that time I was lying flat on the ground hiding behind a dead man. The attacker then came to the entrance of the hall. As I saw him, he saw me and I imagine that he must have observed my movement as well; therefore he pointed his weapon towards me. I was sure that I will be killed now. At that time no thought about the family or any thing else crossed my mind. The only thought which came to my mind was to communicate with the God. So, I posed this question to my God “God, is it the end? And then in the same breath, I asked the next question, which I addressed to him in my mother tongue and said “*jehraye nazarae toun manu wakhai nain, ouh awein san?*” Translated into English, it roughly meant that “All those visions which you have shown me about the future were just nothing?” My caring, loving, protecting and all omnipotent God answered immediately. The attacker aimed and then fired three bullets at me, which did not hit me. I did not even feel the bullets hitting anywhere near me. I however did not stir. By that time I had observed that any one who moans or stirs, is instantly shot by him. He was firing single shot, targeting people systematically. I thought that he is going to kill us all one by one. Since I had ducked and was lying motionless, therefore I did not see him until I looked up again after hearing the sound of gun shots after some time. People later told me that after firing from the doorway he had changed magazine and calmly walked to the centre of the hall. When I heard the firing start again and did not feel the fire coming in my direction, I slightly raised and turned my head and saw from the corner of my right eye that he was facing away from me and firing, targeting people from right to left one by one. He would fire two or three bullets on each person and then select the next target and start firing at it.

That was the moment, on an instinctive impulse; I got up in a flash and rushed towards him. He was 24 feet away from me (I measured the distance later). I don't remember whether I ran, jumped, flew or I was propelled by the angels or thrown at him by the God, as I have a very

vague memory of my movement. But in the space of time, it takes one to press the trigger once, I was upon him. I say so, because in that time, when I was rushing towards him, I only heard him fire one shot. I was moving at such a tremendous speed that when I hit him in the waist region he was thrown off balance and the weapon fell from his hand. Such was my speed and so great was the jolt to him that one nephew of mine trapped in the basement, was able to see him, thought that the terrorist has been hit a bullet in the head. I grabbed and threw him on ground. He tried to get hold of his weapon but I snatched it from him by pulling it by its barrel. That is when I burnt my left hand. I sat on him and held him by the neck. Since his arms were free therefore he tried to move his arm under his belly. I thought that he wants to pull a grenade out. So I let his neck go and pulled his hand away from his belly and started hitting the base of his skull with ferocious punches. This I believe stunned and temporarily immobilized him. It is then that I called for help. M F came with a stick and then N also came to hold him down. I then picked up his weapon and directed the others to tie him up with neckties. Later I instructed the people to remove his bandolier and any other weapon that he might still have on his person. An explosive belt was also removed from his person. He had not been able to detonate the explosive laden belt due to my timely action. The country's interior minister, later talking to the media, said that it has happened for the first time that a suicide attacker was unable to detonate himself and he has been taken alive. The importance of this person being caught alive and his criticality to the planners of this heinous crime is indicated by the Monday night's (1st June) bold raid of the terrorist on Jinnah Hospital, which was most likely executed to eliminate him, in the hospital where he was being treated.

After disarming and securing the prisoner, I picked up his weapon and took two people with me and we went to search other halls and reassure the people that the situation is under control. Someone then informed the people outside that the attacker has been captured and the situation is under control. We asked for the ambulances which came quickly. People inside the hall immediately got busy in attending to the wounded and started evacuating them. I informed the police about the terrorist captured alive who took him into their custody. The second terrorist had gone to first floor hall which was almost empty save for a few *Khudam* on duty. He had been taken by these four daring and brave *Khudam* , despite one

of them having suffered a bullet injury from his firing. After informing the police I came out of the premises and drove straight to the house to meet the family and reassure them about my well being. I changed the clothes soaked with blood and then went to hospital for treatment. The entire drama lasted for forty long and agonizing minutes. During this period I saw the most horrifying human sitting duck shoot, which probably has no parallel. Most of the deaths that occurred in Model Town happened in the main hall, before my own eyes. Every time I remember the events of that day, I feel sorry for those who died there and an overpowering feeling of helplessness and loss overtakes me. I repeatedly ask a question from myself, that, could it have ended in a different manner or could some thing different have been done to save some more of them? The answer evades me but comes back to haunt me again and again. I am at loss for the words to express my grief and shock.

The last thing which I would like to tell you is that, all this while, we were without any outside help and only at the mercy of God. And God did shower his mercy upon us and saved innocent children and his humble servants in hundreds.

There is a spiritual angle to the whole event which in my opinion is related to this incident and I must share it with you. A few days ago my father-in-law saw in a dream that *Chacha* Abdullah (my late father) is standing surrounded by people and he points to his right leg and says that I have been hit by a bullet. He says that, in the dream he, however did not feel any anxiety, rather experienced the feeling of calm. When the vision was narrated to me, I thought that it relates to me and some how or the other it will physically happen to me. So on Thursday the 27th of May, I told my wife that I will give the entire pension of mine for this month as *sadqa* to the poor to ward off the danger to me and to seek the God's protection. After the horrific event was over, I went to search for my father-in-Law and when I met him and narrated the whole event to him and told him that I have been hit by a grenade pellet in the right foot and showed the wound to him, a few people were standing around me in a circle. Surely the God has his own ways of working and he works in strange ways to bring about the events foretold by him. Another vision of a nephew of mine who currently lives in London is also worth relating.

He told me after the event that “on Thursday the 27th of May in the evening, he was lying on the bed and watching TV. He briefly dozed off. And saw that *Mamoon* Abdullah is standing surrounded by a large number of people and he is wearing jet black *shalwar kurta*. Then he sees that suddenly his mood has turned ferocious and the sign of terrible annoyance are visible on his face and he rushes towards some one in an aggressive manner and snatches some object from him which appears to be a weapon. After he has done that, his face starts glowing and I feel that the face of *Mamoon* Abdullah is radiating the light of courage and valor”.

In both the visions narrated above, I think I have been portrayed as Abdullah, which means a man of God. I am just that and no more. When I recollect the events of that day I often wonder as to why I stayed in the hall and did not go into the basement with others? No thought of escape ever occurred to me. Throughout the period when the great tragic event was taking place, not for a moment I thought of my wife and children. It never occurred to me that I should try to save myself. I stayed in the position where I had found the place initially at the start of the congregation and watched all the happenings with trepidation from the same point. When the grenade exploded next to me I ran and positioned myself at point from where I was subsequently able to find the opportunity to attack the terrorist. When I thought that I will be killed as the attacker aimed and fired three bullets at me, I was saved and remained fit to execute the task destined to be performed by me. When *Apa M* (Gen Nasir’s daughter) praised my action which saved many lives and sought the details from my wife. She narrated the joke I had told her about a Sikh, who had jumped into the river to save a drowning boy and when people asked him to explain his heroic effort, he said “first tell me who had pushed me”. She commented that “It was God who had pushed him” I entirely agree with her. While the perpetrators of this heinous crime were planning the murder, *Khiar-ul- Makreen* was planning his own remedy, unknown to any one or to even myself. Who was to be used just as an instrument, a pawn in the hands of God. I therefore deserve no credit.

There is a personal aspect also, which relates to my immediate family and I would appreciate if you bear with me for a few more minutes and know about that too. That is about my wife, daughter and the son. Their comportment at the time of the crisis must also be shared with you. While the events related to the attack were being telecast live on the TV channels, we were not in communication with each others. My daughter on hearing about the siege of the Model Town Mosque was worried and weeping too. Her colleague tried to reassure her by saying that do not worry, uncle has proper training and he will save himself by taking cover. To that, my daughter replied “You do not know my father, I know my father better, he is not the one who will take it lying down and that is the thing which worries me the most”. She said that, she was however confident that nothing will happen to me. She derived her confidence from those visions about my future which I had shared with my wife and the children. My son remained calm throughout this gory episode while he was in the school, but broke down when I talked to him after the event. His tears were the tears of relief and gratitude. My wife maintained her composure and remained calm. She was sure that I shall remain safe. That is reflective of her unflinching faith in the protective hands of the God. The maids in the house said that “we fear for the *Sahib's* safety because he is not the one who will sit back”. I thank my God for giving me the courage and wisdom to come up to the expectations of my near and dear ones. Each word which I have written is true and is from the core of my heart.

After the event till the time of writing this short narrative, I have received innumerable calls from friends, relatives and persons unknown to me. The calls came from far away and diverse regions and countries such as Waziristan, Kashmir, USA, UK, Germany, Canada and Zambia. They called to appreciate my action. I have individually thanked all of them and now I once again gratefully acknowledge their concern for my well being. I say to those who are fighting the ugly menace of terrorism that, I now know the perils they face, therefore I pray for them all the time, because they need our prayers. I request you to also render strength to them through prayers and expression of support for them publicly.

I send this brief description of the events of that fateful day to my sister, brothers, cousins, nephews, nieces, friends, colleagues and all others who are close to my heart, in the hope that they will remember me in their prayers. Names of living people have not been mentioned due to the security reasons.