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A Measure of Grief

It was early morning, when the violent Earthquake shook us all up. We rushed out of the house, looking neither here nor there, each one for himself. Soon after we began making frantic phone calls to loved ones, concerned about their safety. Awaiting for SMS replies we all had our hands up in prayer. There was no one on the face of this Earth who could help us, no one other than God Himself.

Thank God A.S was safe, and so was A.M, but A.M's parents were still buried under the rubble. F.H had lost many family members. Sad news about S.R's death and of many others had spread like wild fire. We were all affected in one way or the other – either directly or indirectly. We had either lost a relative, a loved one or an acquaintance. The grief in my heart was unimaginable. *Was this really happening* was all I thought to myself?

Was it possible for things to get worse?

We had to come back to reality and actually do something about this catastrophic human tragedy. Through a friend, we were informed about this 'shelter home' in F-7/4. We grabbed whatever we could and arrived there. Some individual had donated his house as a refuge for women and children. There was a very homely atmosphere there. In the garden, we were greeted by lovely children who despite plasters on their legs and arms were busy colouring in their colouring books. Inside, there were several rooms filled with women and children. There were volunteers there who were helping them dress, bathe, and some were there to just talk to them and make them feel better. One woman there was in extreme shock. She was wailing and screaming out loud. Nothing was pacifying her; it was difficult to even look towards her, let alone straight into her hopeless and fearful eyes. These people had lost many of their immediate relatives; some were still buried under the rubble. Families had been separated...

Was it possible for things to get worse?

The next day, we decided to pay a visit to the make-shift medical camp in the Jinnah Stadium, at the Sports Complex. There was a lot more hustle bustle with patients being brought in from hospitals after being initially treated and discharged, but not well enough to go back home, and even if they were well enough to go back, there wasn't much of a home left to go back to. Many needed daily dressing changes, medication and nursing care. Doctors and volunteers were milling around trying to get things organized.

I was immediately drawn to a beautiful green eyed girl who was sitting in a wheel chair. Instantly, I was able to sense the sadness in her posture. I went and sat next to her. Initially, I felt slightly awkward as the girl was extremely quiet. I began making small

talk with her. Her name was Saiqa and she was only 13 years old. She was in school when the earthquake happened.

Saiqa occasionally smiled when talking about life back home, but then suddenly she would think back as to what had happened and then hopelessness would once again cloud her face. She was missing her parents and two younger sisters who were back at home in Bagh. Saiqa would do anything to go back home. Her elder brother who has accompanied her was very concerned about her and was trying his best to look after her well. He requested us to stay with her when her dressing was to be changed, that perhaps we could give her some solace. But no, all Saiqa screamed was for her mother.

Saiqa wanted to become a doctor and was proud of the fact that she always came 1st in class. Her expression belied a maturity beyond her tender age. Her dreams were shattered and there was no hope behind her eyes.

Was it possible for things to get worse?

Some school friends of mine and I decided to go and offer our help to the Poly Clinic Hospital. We had to wear masks and gloves as soon as we entered as there was a very high risk of infections. I was not at all prepared to take in what was in store for me ahead.

We stepped into the children's ward and found that it was overflowing with beds. There were beds even in the corridors. We went around and began talking to the children. It was amazing how these children had been through so much and they still were able to smile and talk to us. They were content with what they had.

Each child had a different story to tell. Some had lost their mother, their father, their siblings, while some had lost literally everything. Some children had plasters, while others had just gotten body parts amputated. At first I stood there cringing at the sight of children in dirty clothes, plasters, stitches and the smell of infections. But then I decided to put myself in their place... I could have been that child, sitting there. If a wall had collapsed on me, there would have been no element of beauty remaining in me. I would have liked people to come and sit close to me, hold my hand, stroke my hair and talk to me. I wouldn't want them to look at me as if I was some sort of a freak.

That is when I realized how these children actually felt and what they were going through. Their conditions were bad. Some needed to get operated on while others conditions were worsening. There was a feeling of hope as well as fear in their hearts.

Any lesson learnt?

So the lesson I learnt was that there was always a worse situation than the "worst" I had just experienced. I also kept in mind that the people I met were the lucky ones. They had got "help". There are still thousands more out there for whom help has yet to come. I can not even imagine what their situation would be. Would they be the "worst" of the "worst"? Can things get any worse? I am now sure that there are always worse situations than what we have just experience as our worst. I have learnt to be grateful for my

situation. I was always looking “up to” people who I thought were “better” off than I was. But since the earthquake, I now know that there will always be people worse off than me, no matter what my situation.