

After hardship comes ease

Surah 94, Verse 5

After suffering child abuse, **Yaqub Hussain** was imprisoned for eight weeks. He vowed to change his life, and upon release, became a solicitor.

My home will always be the steel town of Scunthorpe where I grew up in the 80s. As the only Pakistani family in a predominantly white neighbourhood, life on the street was tough and being bullied was part of the daily routine. Unfortunately, life at home was worse. I was physically and mentally abused as a child.

Our local mosque was run by the Bangladeshi community and being Pakistani, I couldn't understand what was going on in classes. I found myself singled out and disciplined, just like home. Instead of finding peace in the mosque, I found distress. It was then that I started visiting churches and other places of worship. I was able to follow the services clearly and it was then that I began to identify the remarkable similarities between both Christianity and Islam, which made me feel safe and comforted. I developed a great appreciation and respect for other faiths, which I still carry now.

Despite being singled out from my family, I was incredibly close to one of my sisters, who was very loving to me. One day, she sat me down and told me that I needed to be strong and stay out of trouble. Tears streamed from her eyes as she hugged me tightly. I, a young boy of 11, sat there confused. The next day, she was gone and my world collapsed. She was 16 and was being forced into marriage, so she ran away. I never saw her again.

Around that time, my mother also left for Pakistan. She came back after five years, but I was never told why she was leaving us in the first place. Things grew worse at home and as a way of coping with the bullying at school, I became the class clown and took up martial arts to learn how to defend myself. The combination of the two eventually led to my expulsion from school at the age of 16.

My father soon changed his demeanour towards me and at the same time, my mother returned from Pakistan. I was convinced he had been completely changed when one day he told us we were going on holiday. I had hardly been outside of Lincolnshire, so I was excited to learn we were going abroad to Pakistan. The trip, however, was far from a holiday. Landing at Islamabad airport, I was transported by distant relatives to a remote village. I had been set up and was being forced into marriage, just as my sister had been years earlier. I was adamant I wouldn't let this happen to my life, so I refused. The refusal cost me dearly; I was tied to a chair and beaten for two days by three men. Under the most remarkable circumstances, I managed to run away and get back to the UK before the marriage could take place.

I now had to work on building a life for myself. I was in my mid-20s at that point, and to make ends meet, I began to work night shifts at a supermarket, whilst training to be a fire



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fighter. I was studying for an applied social sciences degree focussing on psychology. I had finally managed to settle myself into a routine, when one afternoon, a man who was fighting with a friend of mine, began to harass me. As I got into my car to get away from him, he got in front of it and reached into his jacket pocket. Afraid he might pull out a gun, I slammed down hard on the gas pedal. Luckily, he jumped onto the car bonnet and didn't suffer any injuries but panicking at what had happened, I foolishly asked a friend of mine to tell the police he had witnessed the incident. I was charged with both perverting the course of justice and dangerous driving.

I was sent to HMP Wolds for eight weeks. I prayed to God every day; for strength and courage to deal with what was coming. I was subjected to daily abuse by other inmates but I quickly developed a tough skin and can only imagine that it came from God. He changed my state of mind to help me deal with the situation at hand.

I soon began talking to the inmates about faith, religion and unity, who found the discussions comforting and helpful. I realised that if I could change things in one of society's most hostile environments, then I should set my aims higher upon my release. It was in prison that I decided to become a lawyer and fight for truth and justice.

Upon my release, I moved to London and put all my energy into achieving my goal. After a difficult start, the turning point came with the Trans-Atlantic Liquid Bomb trial. Despite only being a trainee solicitor, I came to have an instrumental impact on the case of Donald Stewart-Whyte, who was exonerated of all terrorism charges after a three year long nightmare. I had gone from being an inmate, to influencing one of the biggest cases in British legal history, before I had even qualified as a lawyer and I knew it was all due to the grace of God.

Since then, my career has developed at an incredible speed and I have worked on many high profile cases. When I meet my clients for the first time, they are often at the lowest point in their life and I know what that feels like all too well. This allows me to fully empathise with their situation and use my past to help their future. I have learnt first-hand that fear destroys the life in anything it touches. One must not fear when the blessings of the Creator are with us. ● **Yaqub Hussain is a solicitor at Christian Khan. His story is being made into a film by Dignity Entertainment.**