

STRUGGLING to SUCCESS

A little boy was once playing in the garden when he noticed a cocoon hanging from the branch of a tree. As he watched, he was surprised to see a tiny hole appear in the wall of the cocoon. After some time, he noticed that there was something inside, struggling to make its way out. Slowly, with great effort and much struggling, it pushed at the hole, until part of its body had emerged. At that point, the little boy realised, with great delight, that it was a butterfly!

Eager to assist the struggling butterfly, he ran home, entered the kitchen, found a pair of scissors, and raced back to the cocoon, cutting at the hole until he had enlarged it sufficiently. Now that the hole was bigger, the butterfly emerged with ease, tumbling out of the cocoon onto a branch below. However, there was something wrong with the butterfly.

Its wings were shrivelled, while its body was engorged and swollen. The butterfly was unable to fly and remained where it was, weak and frail.

The next day, the little boy told his teacher what had happened and asked him why the butterfly couldn't fly. The teacher explained, "For the butterfly to emerge from the cocoon, it has to undergo a great struggle and difficulty. However, it is this

struggle and difficulty that makes its wings strong, enabling it to fly. If the butterfly does not face this challenge, it will never fly. This struggle is essential for the progress of the butterfly."

The story of 'the boy and the butterfly' is often quoted, yet it remains as relevant as ever. Every one of us has our own challenges and obstacles which we face in our effort to reach Allah Ta'ala and become His special friends. Be it peer-pressure, family frustration or the lack of parental co-operation, the trials are various and affect people differently.

When most people contemplate their goals, they view the struggles that are necessary to achieve them and lose courage, thinking to themselves, "I can never do this, it's impossible!" However, facing these challenges are essential for our progress, as it is these struggles that strengthen us and give us the 'wings' to fly in our journey to Jannah.

It is commonly acknowledged that one of the most effective ways to gain motivation and inspiration is to consider other people who are just like us and faced the same challenges as us, yet overcame the seemingly insurmountable odds and achieved their goal.

The renowned saint, Junaid Baghdaadi (rahimahullah), once said, "Incidents (that motivate one towards piety and righteousness) are an 'army' from the armies of Allah Ta'ala through which He strengthens the hearts of His selected servants." (Risaalatul Mustarshideen pg. 12)

In this regard, there are two types of inspirational stories; stories of women of the past (see last page of this newsletter) and stories of current-day women.

As far as inspirational incidents of current-day women are concerned, Uswatul Muslimah has launched an initiative named '#Modern2Modest' in which our respected mothers and sisters submit true stories of women who overcame their challenges to accept Islam itself, or to reform their lives, gaining the Divine happiness and proximity of Allah Ta'ala. Turn the page to read two such stories of women who are not merely our mothers and sisters, but are true inspirations to the women of the Ummah.

Do you have a personal story to share, or do you perhaps know of someone who has their own story to share? If so, submit the story to info@uswatulmuslimah.co.za

Please note that the identity of the submitters will NOT be published.

A 'MAKEOVER' for my IMAAN



As salaamu 'alaikum

I am thirty years old, and for the last ten years, I have been chasing the world and developing my career as a makeup artist. Alhamdulillah, I have now changed my life and would like to share my story so that others may be inspired.

At the age of twenty, I qualified as a makeup artist. I was exceptionally talented and was ready to take the world by storm! My first 'big break' as a makeup artist was when I worked on the Jay Sean concert during his trip to South Africa. From there, things got better and better, until I opened my own makeup studio.

I was married at the age of twenty-two, and had my son at twenty-four, but I was still focused on my career. I was consumed by my work and was completely caught up in the dunya. I would tell people, "I want my son to become a haafiz of the Quraan." Not once did I think, "How will my son become a haafiz when his mother is so consumed by dunya and fame?"

Soon, I became very well known and I was always fully booked. I started hosting live makeup tutorials on Instagram. I even had makeup sponsorships from different cosmetic companies. I was getting bigger and bigger, but my imaan was getting weaker and weaker. I was not remembering Allah Ta'ala at all and I was oblivious of death. I was not building anything for the Akhirah – but I was building so much in the dunya, not realising that this world is temporary.

Last year, when I was twenty nine, I signed a contract for a ground breaking TV series

airing on e-tv, produced by one of the major giants in productions. I was so excited and thought, "This is my dream!"

On 17th December 2017 I met in a car accident on my way back from work. The car flipped ten times and spun ten times. It landed seventy meters from the road and was a complete write-off. In the accident, I broke my collar bone and still suffer with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) due to that. I had to be rushed for an emergency operation because my bone had pierced through my muscle and was sitting on my artery. I went for the operation and a titanium plate was placed in my shoulder which I have to keep forever, as one bone is broken. It will never be as strong again and it needs extra support.

After my operation, I started feeling different about myself. I was literally bedridden for two weeks. I couldn't even bath or feed myself! The recovery pain was more severe than when my bone was broken!

Anyway, I got back to working on the series with my arm in a sling as I was still in recovery. Days passed, but I just wasn't feeling any contentment, happiness or enjoyment in my 'dream job' or even freelancing again. Then I became a brand ambassador for a new makeup brand, and even then, I didn't feel any contentment or joy.

On 1st March my nani (mother's mother) passed away. As soon as I heard the news, I rushed back from work to be with my mum. My job hours were twelve to sixteen hours a day – that's how TV works. Anyway, I saw my mum broken. I have never seen her like that before –

- she was always so strong!

The next week, I went back to work feeling more and more uneasy and uncomfortable. Finally, that Friday, I woke up and decided that I was not going to continue with this job any longer. I didn't want this life anymore and so I resigned. The production company initially rejected my resignation and insisted that they needed me, but I insisted on resigning and told them that my family needed me more.

I had spent ten years running behind my career and the dunya without any concern about the Akhirah. These two events in my life changed me without me even realising it. Alhamdulillah, Allah Ta'ala guided me and inspired me to change my life.

I started thinking, "What if I pass away while my pictures are all over social media?" That's when I realised how much I had exposed myself to the world. It was then that I started contemplating going into niqaab. I was thinking about it constantly and making du'aa because the urge within me was so strong. Eventually, I decided to permanently give up my life as a makeup artist and go into niqaab.

Alhamdulillah, I have never felt so much of contentment in my life! Now I remember Allah Ta'ala and think about the Akhirah every day. Before, I was a career-driven, 'independent' woman, and now I am so proud to say that I am a 'stay at home' mum, a wife and a niqaabi (woman wearing the niqaab).

If I could make the change, anyone can. Allah Ta'ala is always there. Call to Him and He will answer.



MY JOURNEY in to the UNKNOWN

All praise is due to Allah Ta'ala, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Blessings and salutations upon our beloved Nabi Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wasalam).

Bismillahir Rahmaanir Raheem

I was born into a mixed-parentage family. My father was a Buddhist Chinese and my mother is a Hindu. They both practiced different faiths. I grew up worshipping idols and visiting temples, so I never felt odd or weird about the rituals. Because I was born in a Muslim country, Islam was not foreign to me.

I was seventeen when I started asking questions about my religion. Prayers and rituals did not make sense anymore. I then started seeking the religion that made the most sense. An invitation came for me to visit a church and attend a sermon. I did attend, but still felt that it wasn't for me.

I never kept Islam as an option because the Muslims whom I knew were not a good example of a religion that I wanted to follow. Being the majority in my country, Muslims were the ones who were committing most of the crime. *In my eyes, they were bad, so how could Islam be the perfect religion?*

At twenty one, I found a job with a reputable airline. At this time, religion wasn't my concern anymore. It was all about having fun and living the glamorous life. One day, I met a man. Little did I know that he would become my husband. I accepted Islam and everything changed, including my name.

After we were married, Allah Ta'ala blessed

me with a beautiful baby girl. I took baby steps towards understanding Islam while juggling motherhood at the same time. I was learning the basics of salaah and would sometimes struggle to read the transliteration of certain surahs. But none of this had an effect on me. I was growing more and more miserable inside and felt that Islam was something alien to me.

Two years later, I was blessed with another child. My husband then decided to uproot us and move us to his country (South Africa). Alhamdulillah, he always had great concern about providing the best Deeni environment for myself and the children. I eventually moved with a heavy heart, leaving my parents behind.

During these times, I was silently crying to Allah Ta'ala and even questioning Him (*astaghfirullah!*), as this was certainly not the way that I wanted my life to be. Tawakkul (trusting Allah Ta'ala) had not come into my heart yet, so I did not realize that Allah Ta'ala always has something better in store and that He always knows best.

Moving to a foreign country is no easy task. Challenges and trials were coming my way like a big rolling boulder. I now had to cope with madrasah, motherhood and a new environment. Alhamdulillah, I have very kind, loving and supporting in-laws. They often helped me and offered me assistance whenever I needed it. *"If Allah Ta'ala has put you through it, He will definitely help you through it as well. Patience is the key."*

Days became months and months became years. During this period, I began to use the hijab and niqaab, and became more confident around my new home (South Africa). But something within me still wasn't

connecting with Allah Ta'ala.

One day, my sister-in-law approached me and told me to start ta'leem at home. I listened, but felt, *"What can a kitaab do to change me? How can it possibly give me the connection with Allah Ta'ala?"* Anyway, I did ta'leem for a few days and then stopped, forgetting that Allah Ta'ala is the changer of hearts and that guidance comes only from Him.

A few days later, someone invited me to join them for a weekly ta'leem programme. Out of courtesy, I agreed (this was the very first ta'leem programme that I attended). During the ta'leem, I felt as if every message that the sister was delivering was for me, solely for me. It seemed as if she knew exactly what I needed to hear.

She mentioned a few points that stirred something within me:

- Allah Ta'ala will not change the condition of the people if they do not change it themselves.
- Take one step towards Allah Ta'ala, and He will take ten steps towards you. Walk towards Him, and He will run towards you.
- Imaan is like the sugar in a cup of tea. It sinks to the bottom of the cup. We have to stir it to taste the sweetness, or else it remains there.

The points that I heard in this ta'leem played on my mind for some time. It dawned on me that my imaan is something that I have to work on, not anyone else. I had to strive to improve my connection with my Rabb – and that is what I did. Alhamdulillah, with the help of Allah Ta'ala, love for Deen and my yaqeen (conviction) in Allah Ta'ala has grown.

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I came to realize that all challenges and trials are actually blessings. Allah Ta'ala tests those whom He loves. Our Nabi (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) and the Sahaabah (radhiyallahu 'anhum) were put through such hardship and tests, yet they were so beloved to Allah Ta'ala. "And with difficulty comes ease", Allah Ta'ala has promised.

Now, having tasted the sweetness of imaan, I wanted my parents to accept Islam. Alhamdulillah, my father accepted Islam in 2006 and passed away in 2011 as a Muslim (may Allah Ta'ala place him among the

In the 'olden days', the solution to cracked and chapped lips was a rusty yet trusty tub of Vaseline. Nowadays, we have a vast variety of lip balms, lip oils, lip butters and lip salves.

In the 'olden days', if you asked a person what he had on his foot, he would answer, "A shoe". Nowadays, ask a person the same question, and the answer will vary between 'pumps', 'heels', 'platforms', 'boots', 'sandals', 'takkies', 'sneakers' and other forms of footwear that have walked onto the scene.

In the 'olden days', people's day-to-day activities such as the household chores were sufficient to keep them occupied and also keep them in shape. Nowadays, there is no shortage of people signing up for Pilates, kickboxing, taibo, classes with a personal trainer, spinning classes, gym memberships and much more in the effort to stay 'slim and trim'.

Times have evidently changed, and with the commencement of the twenty first century, people have become more concerned about their appearance than ever before. In fact, people's obsession over appearance has reached such proportions that on its strength alone, the cosmetic, clothing and fitness industries have flourished into multi-billion dollar enterprises.

When leaving home, they look into the mirror, when sitting in the car, they pull down the visor and look into the mirror, when walking through a department store, they pause for a moment to look into the mirror, and when seated with friends, they reach into their handbag to look into their compact mirror. In every case, they rely on the mirror to give them a sense of confidence and contentment by reassuring them that they are indeed 'beautiful'.

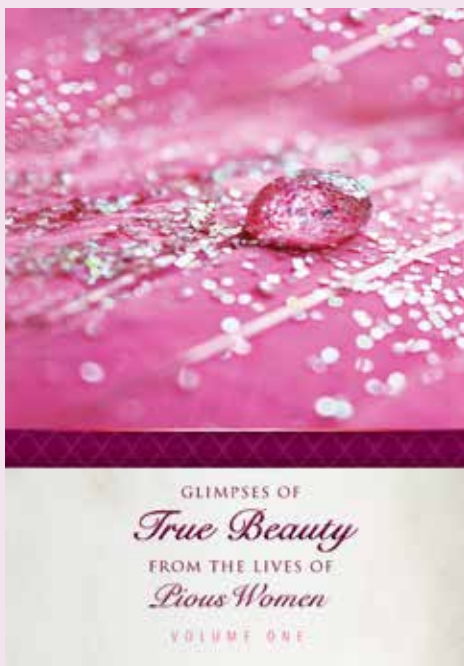
righteous and grant him Jannah, aameen).

I am now concerned about my mother. I make du'aa that Allah Ta'ala grant her hidaayah (guidance) and the understanding of Islam. My children have initiated ta'leem at home with the intention of hidaayah for my mother and for all mankind as well. May Allah Ta'ala accept our effort.

Dear readers, with no effort from me and only through the mercy and help of Allah Ta'ala, my children have a great deal of interest in Deen. I must thank Allah Ta'ala

for the tarbiyah (Deeni upbringing) of my children, for I was worried that I was incapable of giving them a good Islamic upbringing. May Allah Ta'ala grant them *istiqamah* (steadfastness) and make them a means of hidaayah (guidance) for others, aameen.

During this journey of mine, I've learned that we, as Muslims, should never take our Deen for granted, for it is a precious gift that some will never enjoy. Allah Ta'ala has chosen you. Treasure your imaan and nurture it. Hold onto the blessed sunnah and the rope of Allah Ta'ala at all times, and He will do the rest.



strive to 'look good', the less we strive to 'be good'. The mirror is undoubtedly an excellent, impartial judge, as it shows us our every blemish, from a pimple on our cheek to food stuck in our teeth. However, the mirror can only show us the beauty which is skin deep. To see beyond the skin, we need to engage in reflection.

Rasulullah (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) has taught us to recite the following du'aa when looking into the mirror:

Allahumma anta hassanta khalqee fahassin khuluqee

O Allah! You have beautified my physical creation (and appearance), so beautify my character.

In this du'aa, we are given the very same message – turn your gaze inwards. Ponder and reflect over your internal state and make an effort to acquire TRUE BEAUTY – the beauty of the heart.

Alhamdulillah, Uswatul Muslimah has published a book entitled "Glimpses of True Beauty from the Lives of Pious Women." This book contains a collection of selected stories of pious women taken from the 'Pious Women' category on the Uswatul Muslimah website. Studying the incidents of these personalities and pondering over the lessons learnt from their lives will assist us to reflect over our own lives and inspire us to acquire the TRUE BEAUTY with which they had been blessed.

May Allah Ta'ala accept this effort, allow us to follow in the footsteps of these saintly souls and raise us with them on the Day of Qiyaamah, aameen.

Visit www.uswatulmuslimah.co.za for more info.

Mirror mirror on the wall
How do I look today?
Will I turn the heads of one and all
or chase them far away?

Foundation will put my flaws behind
Cosmetics are really the key
Not a single blackhead or blemish you'll find
Though sadly I'm not what you see!

When the foundation fades and is no more
I'll be forced to flee and hide
My true colours will come to the fore
Is there any beauty inside?

Regrettably, the more we obsess over our appearance and stare at our reflection, the less we actually reflect over our 'true beauty' – the beauty which resides within the heart. The more we