

## **A deep friendship with myself**

It was July, and the oppressive lockdowns of the third wave of COVID-19 had just come to an end, bringing a sense of renewal as the city's services and centers reopened. During my paragliding training, I was honored of being recognized as one of the top three female athletes in my province, which filled me with immense motivation. Upon returning to university, our organization was on the verge of receiving official approval for its activities—a testament to our dedication and hard work. Furthermore, Kabul University expressed admiration for our innovative efforts, suggesting we collaborate on an enhanced version of the air purifying device I had developed.

During this period, I felt as though I was living my dream. I was deeply immersed in my pursuits, often returning home late, oblivious to the world around me, my family, and the unfolding events globally. My parents sometimes argued with me for my absence, as I would leave early in the morning and return late at night. While this dream life brought me joy, it was short-lived.

Social media buzzed with news of the Taliban seizing control of various provinces in Afghanistan, yet I could hardly believe they would one day take my city, Mazar-e-Sharif. Soon, however, the university announced an indefinite closure due to security concerns, without providing any clear explanations. My paragliding coach advised us to take a month off, as the future remained uncertain. Similarly, our organization sent out a message stating that we needed to pause our activities until conditions improved. Despite the growing unease, I held onto the hope that normalcy would return and our work would resume.

Seizing the opportunity presented by this hiatus, I decided to obtain my sports ID card, which required my father's signature. Unfortunately, my father, who was quite strict, tore up my registration form. Just five days later, chaos engulfed the city as Mazar-e-Sharif fell to the Taliban without any conflict or bloodshed, leaving everyone in shock.

My family and I, like many others, remained at home for an extended period. I lacked the courage to check social media, while my mother and sisters occupied themselves online, their tears flowing daily as they witnessed the plight of others. I felt a knot in my throat, akin to a bird suddenly breaking its wings in flight, as I tried to block out the harsh reality.

There were nights when I stayed awake, listening to the steady drip of water from the kitchen faucet or the rhythmic snoring of my sisters. Even when I managed to drift off, my sleep was so fragile that another nightmare would inevitably jolt me awake. In those moments, my eyes would open, yet my body felt paralyzed, unable to move. I would grit my teeth and try to scream, hoping one of my sisters would hear and come to rescue me. I couldn't identify this affliction or disorder, but those torturous nights became a shared ordeal not just for me, but for my sisters as well.

Meanwhile, the Women's Sports Federation, which actively supported all sports, offered asylum to representatives from Balkh province in countries like the UK and Albania. My coach encouraged me to participate, but unfortunately, due to my father's strictness, I lacked an official sports ID card. To make matters worse, my phone had broken, resulting in the loss of all my training videos, photos, and contact information for my teammates, leaving me unable to accept the offer.

In the volunteer organization where I worked, we focused on projects aligned with sustainable development goals, yet many of our colleagues migrated, causing our efforts to grind to a halt. The activities of another organization I had co-founded with my university classmates were also banned by the Taliban government. I was utterly shocked and didn't know how to respond. I lost sleep and found myself unable to cry. The anger within me burned so intensely that I couldn't communicate with anyone. My mother, well aware of my temperament, patiently awaited the moment when I would feel ready to share my emotions. In those days, I was numb; I couldn't cry or speak, merely swallowing my feelings as my face turned pale.

One day, my father, ever stoic and unemotional, said with that same indifference, "Don't be upset, my daughter. Everything will be fine again."

My tears, like a long-dormant volcano, suddenly erupted. They flowed uncontrollably, and I instinctively began to shout. With eyes brimming with tears, I exclaimed, "Do you even realize what has happened? Everything is over! All that I worked so hard for has turned to ash. I am nothing! I can't even migrate because you tore up my sports ID card! This is the greatest injustice you've inflicted upon me! While my friends have left the country, I am trapped in this desolate land with no way out. I feel worthless, as if I've lost everything!"

My father, who had always appeared cold and unyielding, was momentarily taken aback by the depth of my despair. He stepped back, gesturing with both hands as if to soothe me, "It's alright, please calm down." My brother, having heard my cries, rushed upstairs with concern, asking, "What's happening? Did you hurt my sister?" My father, with a worried expression, replied, "I didn't do anything; she's in this state on her own." I left the room and retreated to our bedroom. My tears continued for two hours, and, like every other night, sleep eluded me. Morning arrived, but I remained restless.

I stepped outside, lay down on the grass, and stared up at the blue sky. Lost in profound thought, I reflected on how this rage and anger I had displayed marked the third time in my life I had reacted with such intensity during moments of extreme upset or anger. Now, I felt an overwhelming sense of shame. I pondered how this reaction revealed my greatest fear: in those moments, I felt devoid of respect or fear. The essence of control lies in either respect or fear; without them, one becomes uncontrollable—both to oneself and to others.

Moreover, I was engulfed in sorrow, believing all my accomplishments had turned to dust. I resolved to delve deeper into understanding myself. It was then that I began exploring self-help and sports psychology literature. I immersed myself in various texts, educational programs, and lectures by psychologists.

My studies in psychology have had a significant impact on me and have brought about major changes in my life. Ultimately, I realized that these difficult experiences have helped me establish a deep friendship with myself. With hope for the future, I moved forward.

Currently, I am waiting to receive my documents so that I can either continue my studies or embark on an independent path. Ultimately, life always has its challenges, but the kind friends I have and the inner peace and tranquility I possess in my mind are incredibly valuable. Fortunately, God has tested me and helped me recognize my shortcomings and become a better person.