

Soul's Journey

The room was bright; the young bald patient was in her bed, surrounded by her husband, sisters, brothers, and mother. As soon as they saw me step inside, someone said, "The chaplain is here; let's pray." They all joined hand and prayed the Lord's Prayer. When they finished, I offered them my own words of prayer, asking God for strength and patience. The patient looked at me weakly, nodding. The family concluded by saying "Amen," and someone said, "Beautiful prayer." When I stepped outside the room, the mother, a tall Caucasian elderly woman, stood in front of me, and she held both my shoulders at arm's length. She looked at my *hijab*, peered down into my eyes, and asked, "Now, *what* are you?" I smiled sheepishly and answered, "I'm a Muslim." Immediately she pulled me close in a tight hug, saying, "Thank you." Her daughter died two hours later.

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At the moment when she hugged me, I felt accepted and connected at the core of my being. It was a powerful moment. During that moment we shared our humanity. No labels, no judgment, only her acceptance and my gratitude. It allowed me to see eye to eye with another human being and to experience religion not as a factor that separates us but instead as a force that binds us together. Faith is not a fracturing force but instead a healing presence. I believe that the heart of each religion is pulsing with compassion, grace, and mercy from one person towards another in our common humanity. My soul is full and nourished after such encounters with patients, family members, and caregivers.

I've grown deeper through my journey as a chaplain. I believe that there is a need for a soul's journey inside each and every person. The places that I have witnessed on my journey may not be visible to the eye, but they are just as wonderful and memorable as those we can see. My experiences as a chaplain take my soul along a journey of self-awareness guided by trust and reliance on God. I feel that I have an understanding of my past, acceptance of my present, and guidance for the future. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him said: "God said: I am as My servant thinks I am." Through it all, my soul found the reality that I hail as truth, that God is the Most Merciful and Ever Compassionate, even as I encounter illness, suffering, death, and dying.

The way I understand my soul work is that it's a reservoir of energy. Love from God is there, freely offered to infuse my soul with goodness

as long as I'm connected and wanting His support. The connections that I make with other humans are ways to nourish each other's soul, using the same source of God's love. On some days where it's hard to find calm, comfort, and love, I turn to both my sources: God and His beautiful creations, other human beings. I believe that the compassionate practice that I do in delivering spiritual care leads to this understanding of how we can help one another in the soul's journey towards healing.

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