No one Misses the Missing Anymore

By

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"Please rush home, Darling. Our Ahmed hasn't returned from school yet and it's already 5:00 PM." The father of "our Ahmed" rushes home, and asks the neighbor whom he hasn't seen in three years, if he seen his son that afternoon. After receiving "no" as an answer, the panic begins to mount. Ahmed's parents visit the Police Station where they fill in Form SAPS 55(A), for a Missing Person. The FaceBook and Twitter account of his friends are updated, and thousands of BBM and WhatsApp messages frantically starts making the rounds.

After an hour or so of uneasiness, his parents decide to phone the principal of the school to ask if Ahmed left home safely that day: "What do you mean if he left school safely? He didn't come at all today. He is a sickly child, and suffers from seizures. We have a whole stack of doctor's letters from Dr Quacky for this year only." "Whaaat! Since when does my son suffer from seizures?" This is when his parents realize they were duped all the time.

By the time "our Ahmed" is found in a seedy club out of town, he is stoned out of his mind and with great embarrassment, is brought home. As everyone eagerly waits to welcome him, the following message is given to them: **"Ahmed has been found and is safely reunited with his family. Please DO NOT enquire further about the matter and respect the family's sentiments in this regard."** What an anti-climax to such a dramatic story!

A few years ago, a "Missing Person" would either be an extremely dangerous escaped convict, an insane person who simply wandered off unsupervised, or a rich person who was abducted for ransom. The entire community would be united in their concern on this issue; but sadly today, a "missing person" is just another nasty reaction to a domestic, social or economic problem. No one misses the missing anymore. It's just one of those boring stories that people yawn at.

Reasons for going Missing

Apart from the genuine abductions of the rich for ransom like in Pakistan and Mozambique, a would-be couple running away to get married by a back-door Shaikh or Marriage Officer, and the now more common "revenge-kidnapping" of a child or a wife to extort money from their own father or husband, most of the reasons for running away from home have to do with domestic, economic or social issues. This is literally called "running away from a problem," instead of dealing with it- a very poor problem-solving technique indeed.

However, after such a crucial life-altering incident that forces one to re-think one's direction in life, we still find some who are in denial. An example of this was the incident of a few girls who ran off with a few boys to have a jolly good time in a club, but who then falsely accused these

same boys of abducting and raping them to cover their own embarrassment.

Statistics show that normally within three days, the victims are found, but the underlying problem becomes bigger and more complicated. Instead of focusing on solving it at this advanced stage of crises, the family now needs to now deal with community perception and their reputation in society. In South Africa, an estimated 35 000 people are reported missing each year (that's one person every 15 minutes), 99.5 % of whom are thankfully located within a week. Approximately one-third of them, mostly those on drugs, will go missing more than once.

Common reasons for children going missing include a breakdown in communication with their parents. Young children have been found in strange hiding places like under their parent's bed and in the cupboard of their domestic worker. For teenagers, the reasons are much more. They include anxiety and depression, domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse, family dysfunction, peer pressure, and poor coping skills. In more conservative homes, most of the time it is outright rebellion. The parents are seen to be stuck in the "ice age" or in "religious mode," and the first opportunity the children get at making a dash for their freedom in the fresh and new exciting world, they jump at it. In some instances, runaways are themselves victims of physical and sexual abuse.

Thankfully, we haven't yet reached a stage where you find husbands or wives going missing due to marital conflicts, or worst still, parents running away from their own homes because they are too afraid of their own children!! I hope we do not live to see such a sad day.

Going missing is a hugely embarrassing problem that can affect any family at any time. Problems are an integral part of any household, but many have not learnt how to dance in the rain and use an umbrella. For them, they just wish that it shouldn't rain.

Coping with Life

Running away from your family or community and taking refuge with strangers or friends, makes you more vulnerable. As a loner without protection and support, the chances of you becoming a victim of crime is great, but becoming a victim of being unfairly taken advantage of - in many ways - is almost guaranteed. You may think that you are solving one problem by running away, but by doing so, you have ignored the many security advantages of being a member of a secure family.

If the above fact does not convince you to stay at home and face the problem in a mature way, then know that everyone has their own lives to lead. No one will change their lifestyles for you. A person normally adjusts his or her life due to schooling or education commitments, after getting married or having a baby, or making a career decision. They do not do so for a total stranger who just popped in from the cold. After a day or two, you will realize that the initial welcome will be wearing off, and people want things to normalize: your life, as well as theirs. And so it will be time to put your tail between your legs and head home to face the music. In society, 80% of people just don't care for you, and the rest just want to have something to gossip about.

So instead of running away from your problems in order to come back to a greater one, here is are six steps to solve all problems in life: 1) Understand that the Almighty created life full of problems. This is how He has designed life in order for us to grow. Wishing for a smooth life is

just foolish; 2) The problem that you have has been decreed. You can never escape it. The longer you delay in solving it, the more difficult it will become; 3) Some problems have seemingly no solution. These are meant to endure and test your patience. But all good eventually comes to the patient; 4) Understand that by not being patient, you will not reach your next stage in life. You cannot skip childhood and just enter adulthood; 5) Ask yourself: "Why should I deprive myself of reward and throw myself into more destruction with my own hands? I need to accept the will of the Almighty and learn from it;" and lastly 6) Know that circumstances change all the time. People's hearts and attitudes change, and so does good and bad fortune. Wait for your turn.

Sometimes, the best of memories are made in the worst of times.