

I want to be a Snake Charmer

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It was Sunday, the seventh of September. We were in the month of Ramadhan. Although it is a month of fasting and self reflection, for most of us it becomes more a month of fasting and feasting. Yes, we fast all day long and then feast all night. While the pious ones adhering to the true spirit of Ramadhan succeed in shedding some weight, most of us end up gaining weight. Being Sunday, it was another feast night at the mosque I go to. I pulled into the parking lot. It was crowded. I saw some youths playing bask-football - a blend of football and basketball. Our youth being great improvisers, really want to play football, but there is no place to put goal posts in the parking lot. They tackle like football and score touchdowns by placing the football in the basketball hoop. While avoiding getting caught in the tackle, I parked my car and headed to the mosque.

The mosque was full of people. I went through the crowd hugging and kissing. Trust me, at our mosque, we are all straight people. We only exchange hugs and kisses to show our brotherly affection. Notice I did not say sisterly love. No we don't hug ladies. They are precious. We are very warm hearted people. We get very excited and give a hard squeeze while hugging. Sometimes I even hear my ribs crackling. We do not want to break our sisters' bones.

As the time for *Iftar* (breaking the fast) approached, we filled our plates with pakoras (chick peas hush puppies), chick peas sauté, and fruit chat (spicy fruit cocktail). We all sat on long rows of rectangular tables. The set up looked more like long rowboats ready for the Olympic race. As the time for *Iftar* got closer, we grabbed dates in our right hand and a glass of juice in our left. When only a minute was left, I placed the dates in between my fingers, lifted my elbow to place the dates about an inch from my mouth, which was now full open waiting to receive the dates. Luckily there were no flies around, or they could have wandered into my open mouth and down into my throat. This could have invalidated my fasting, but my eagerness to break my fast as soon as it was possible overwhelmed me. We were akin to Olympian racers or swimmers as they wait for the gun to go off. As soon as the *Muezzin* (the person making the call for the *Iftar*) said *Al*, the dates jumped into our mouth. We did not even wait for him to finish saying *Allah-o-Akbar* (God is the Greatest). After gulping the juice, we were now in attack mode. We started devouring the food racing to finish our plates. We had only ten minutes to finish the plate and we had not eaten all day. We had to be as fast as possible to eat as much as we could. All the hands were moving in unison. From a distance the movement of our elbows resembled a well oiled rowing team at the Olympics. It was not even ten minutes, or at least that is what I thought, when Hafiz Saheb (the person who has memorized the whole Quran and leads the prayer) made the call for the prayer. I wanted to eat some more pakoras, so before leaving the table, I popped two pakoras in my mouth and grabbed two pakoras in my right hand and two in left. By the time I reached the prayer hall, I had finished four pakoras, but two pakoras were still left in my hand. Although the prayer had already started, I popped them into my mouth anyway. By the time Hafiz Saheb finished reciting Al-Fatiha (first chapter of Quran, a required reading in each prayer), I had finished the leftover pakoras and joined the congregational prayer. Luckily Hafiz Saheb kept the prayer very short. I guess he was hungry too. We then headed to the cafeteria for a second course. The food now consisted of Biryani (fried rice mixed with small pieces of beef), Chicken Tikka (barbeque

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chicken), Karahi Gosht (goat meat teriyaki), and Eggplant. Once again we were in attack mode. We again had to finish our food in half an hour to go for the second prayer.

While I was still sipping tea, the *Muezzin* called the *Adhan* (prayer call). I gulped the leftover tea and headed to the prayer hall again. These prayers in the month of Ramadhan are really long, lasting almost two hours. I do not mind the obligatory prayer, which is short and takes only about five to seven minutes. It is the *Traweeh* (night vigil prayer) that I dread. It almost takes two hours and consists of twenty sets, each set lasting for about five minutes. During these prayers, Hafiz Saheb recites a portion of the Quran at a pace to finish the whole Quran in thirty days. While the super pious ones go for the whole twenty sets, averagely pious opt for eight sets. People like me would actually slip out after the obligatory prayer. But being the Principal of the Sunday school, I was in an awkward position. I was supposed to set an example for all the children. When I would see my school children, I would complete eight sets; otherwise I would rocket out of the mosque after the obligatory prayer. If I slipped out after the obligatory prayer, I would avoid making any eye contact. Any eye contact and I would have been doomed for at least eight sets. Thanks to their excessive homework in the school, there usually would not be many children during weekdays and I would manage to slip out after the obligatory prayer. Since that night was a weekend night, there were many children and I had no choice but to offer eight sets. As soon as the eighth sets ended, I was out of the Prayer Hall. In fact I was already at the door when I said my second *Salam* (the prayer ends with turning the head to the right and then to the left while saying *Salam*).

As I was getting out of the mosque, I was greeted by a friend at the door. Even as we were exchanging hugs and kisses, he said, "By the way there is a live snake behind your back."

That scared the living daylights out of me. I jumped about five feet in the air hitting the ceiling and then fell back in his laps. Although I was in a compromising posture, it was better than landing on the snake. In that case, instead of me writing this story, someone else would have been writing my obituary. I shrugged his arms off and recomposed myself. A big crowd had gathered around the snake. On one side there was a group of children and on the other side there were some thoughtful men. There were no ladies in the crowd. Some were giggling and peeking through a glass window. It was not the life insurance they were hoping to cash in. We carry auto insurance, medical insurance, home insurance, but not life insurance. We have a covenant with Allah (God) that if we take care of our calamities in our life, He will take care of our families in our death. The ladies were just playing smart. They wanted the men to do the dirty work. In all of this the poor snake was all coiled up in a corner.

When my panic subsided I joined the men. One of them asked, "Jawaid Saheb, you have written three books, tell us how should we handle this snake."

I replied, "I do have written three books, but they are on Jinns, Angels, Satan, Demons and Adam. I do not know anything about the snake. All I can tell you if the snake is a Jinn or not. Who knows the snake could be on a mission here to trick the super pious ones who were busy praying twenty sets of *Traweeh*. After all it was Satan, a Jinn, who, in the form of a serpent, tricked both Adam and Eve."

He asked "Okay tell me if it is a Jinn."

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It was important for us to find out if it was a Jinn. If it was a Jinn and we killed it, there was a strong possibility that one of the kin of the dead Jinn could possess the killer in revenge. Having no experts among us who could communicate and negotiate a deal with the Jinns, we did not want to take any chance. I asked him if he had a flash light. He did happen to have one and flashed it on the snake. The snake did have a thick shadow. The Jinns are made of gas, can acquire human or animal form, but do not have an obvious shadow (see my book “Secrets of Angels, Demons, Satan, and Jinns – Decoding their Nature through Quran and Science,” for detail).

I gave my verdict. It is not a Jinn. Being an Engineer, I believe in checking and double checking. So I asked everyone to close their eyes for five minutes and recite ‘*oodh billahi minash Shaytan ir rajeem*’ (read to drive off Satan) to give the snake, if he was a Jinn, an honorable exit by reverting back to gaseous form. When we opened our eyes, the snake was still there. It did not dissolve in air. Now I was hundred percent sure. I gave my final verdict that the snake can be killed. I am sure the snake was not happy with my verdict. He probably wished if he could become a Jinn, he would take possession of me. But my verdict did give comfort to the crowd. Having been assured that there would be no revenge coming from the Jinns; they were ready for the great kill.

Since our community consisted mostly of professionals, we had all kinds of doctors. They could fix almost anything, even a plugged heart, but had no expertise in killing snakes. I asked the doctor who was an expert in resuscitation, if he had any action plan.

He said: “We are the healers, not the killers. I am just going to watch. Yes, only watch, just in case someone needs resuscitation.”

The Kidney expert standing next to him responded in a soft voice: “Usually it is the kidney that fails after resuscitation. I will take care of dialysis.”

One of the brothers was on his cell phone explaining what was going on. I thought he was talking to CNN. But when no TV camera showed up after ten minutes, I realized he was obediently explaining to his wife why he was late coming home.

While I was assessing the situation, one brother (in order to avoid loading our brains with all the names, we call our mosque mates brothers and sisters) brought a broom. I thought, cleanliness being half of being Muslim, he wanted to clean the floor before making the big kill. It reminded me of a scene I witnessed in Saudi Arabia. When some one is found guilty of murder, they bring the person in the main square, broom the place of execution, place a cardboard on the floor, make the person prostrate on the cardboard and chop his head. Since the cardboard soaks all the blood, there is no need to wash the floor. I assumed this brother had witnessed the same execution and wanted to follow the same procedure for the snake. It turned out he wanted to kill the snake with the broom. I started laughing.

I said: “Give the snake a break. He may not die with your stroke, but will die out of shame that you did not consider him worthy enough to use some lethal weapon.”

He abandoned the idea. Being an honorable gentleman, he did not want the snake to die in shame.

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Another brother came out of the mosque with a floor duster. Again the same answer. He wanted to kill the snake with the duster.

I said: "While you will be squeezing the snake with the duster, he may think that you are patting him and want to adopt him as his pet. He may then crawl on to your hand and kiss your face."

The brother with the duster started shivering and abandoned the idea too. While his duster was still shaking due to shiver, another brother showed up with a garbage can with a lid in his hand. He wanted to trap the snake inside the garbage can. He thought the snake could be herded like a sheep into a pen. He did not know that being a reptile the snake can only fight or take flight. There is nothing in between for him.

While the brother was still toying with the garbage can, Maulana Saheb came out of the mosque. He was six feet tall, had twelve inch long beard dyed with henna, had rosary in one hand and *Miswak* (twig) in the other hand. (People who fit this profile we call Maulana Saheb). I knew he usually stayed for twenty sets. But I guess the pakora and chick peas created enough turmoil in his stomach that he gave up after twelve sets. Upon being told of the snake, he jumped and took ten steps back, away from the snake. While combing his beard with his finger and cleaning his teeth with *Miswak* (twig), he asked for a long garden hose. Luckily we had a hundred feet long skinny black hose. Maulana Saheb, after putting his *Miswak* (twig) and rosary in his pocket, handed one end of the hose to some youths. After reciting the three *Quls* (the last three chapters of the Quran, recited to ward off evil), he breathed on them and instructed them to point the hose towards the snake. He then grabbed the other end and went all the way to the basketball pole. He then started reciting the three *Quls*. After each recitation, he would blow air into the hose. I asked him why he was doing that.

He replied: "I am trying to drive off the demons (bad Jinns) from around the snake. I do not want them to give bad ideas to the snake."

His solution was to calm the snake down before the big kill. It was supposed to work like anesthesia before a big operation. It seemed to be working. As long as he would blow air into the hose, the snake would lie still. When he would take a break to catch his breath, the snake would toss and turn. While he was reciting and blowing air into the hose, some of us went inside the mosque to search for a lethal weapon.

Maulana Saheb had been reciting and blowing for about half an hour. We had not found the lethal weapon yet. He was running out of breath and started sweating. He took his cap off and started waving it in front of his face to dry his sweat. This gave the demons enough time to slip in and incite the snake for some action. It started moving. The crowd started running. Maulana Saheb being on the other side of the wall did not know what was happening. He was still waving his cap. The snake started following the hose. It probably thought that the hose was his dad and wanted to give him a hug. Before Maulana Saheb knew it, the snake was staring at his face from about five feet. He probably thought that Maulana Saheb was welcoming him with his waving cap. Maulana Saheb froze and fainted with his cap in his left hand and the hose in his right hand. Luckily, by this time a dentist brother had found a shovel. He ran at a lightening speed and took a strong swipe at the mouth of the snake. Now it was the snake's turn to freeze in its tracks. In fact it was dead. If there was anyone who had the skills to do this job, it

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had to be our dentist brother. Having to gaze into the mouth day in day out, he knew exactly where the snake's mouth was and he went straight to it.

Maulana Saheb was still lying on the ground. He even got some squirt from the kill. Now that we needed our Resuscitation expert, he was nowhere to be found. Luckily we had his cell phone number. As it turned out, he had taken refuge on top of a tree. After being assured that the snake was dead he came down. Actually we had to send him a live picture of the dead snake on his cell phone. He was now all pumped up to show his expertise. He tried to resuscitate Maulana Saheb to no avail. He was great in jump starting the heart, but not the brain. Maulana Saheb was too precious for us to let him go. He was one of the icons and life of the mosque. Most important of all he was a great fundraiser. Finally we sent an SOS to Hafiz Saheb (person who had memorized the whole Quran). He had just concluded the *Traweeh* prayer. He came right away and started reciting Yaseen (36th Chapter of Quran recited on a person who is in life-death situation) on Maulana Saheb. His recitation worked. Maulana Saheb came to senses. But seeing the black hose on his stomach, he fainted again. Probably he thought the hose was the snake. Hafiz Saheb again started reciting Yaseen, but this time after removing the hose, and Maulana Saheb came back to his senses for good.

The crowd which by now had swelled considerably and even included some sisters gave a thundering applause for the dentist brother and carried him on their shoulders and danced around the snake. They, on the spot, gave him the title of the Incredible Hulk. Since the *Traweeh* had finished, people started coming out of the mosque and gathered around the dead snake. Some sisters who were into their 20s (no it was not their age, they belonged to the group that offered 20 sets) asked me for detail. When I briefed them about the event, they retorted, "Why didn't you kill it then?"

They had put me on spot, so I quickly slipped out of the crowd. When I came home and told my wife about the question, she started laughing. I was more perplexed. She explained, "Dumbo, don't you understand. They wanted you to attack the snake. Knowing your reputation, they knew that the snake will get the better half of you."

That busted my ego like a pin pricking a balloon. Realizing that I had no killer instinct, I decided that I would become a snake charmer instead.

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About the Writer:

The writer has authored "Secrets of Angels, Demons, Satan, and Jinns – Decoding their Nature through Quran and Science," and "Atom to Adam – How, When and Where in the Light of Quran, Bible and Science (A Study of Human Origin)," both published by InstantPublishers.com (<http://instantpublisher.com/>) and "Lessons from the Qur'an," published by Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>). These books are available from Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com/>) and Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>), respectively. He has also published many essays on religious issues in the Charleston Gazette, West Virginia and written quite a few Islamic satires. He is a Chemical Engineer and possesses Master of Science degrees in Chemical Engineering and Chemistry and has Professional Engineers license from the State of Texas. His e-mail address is mnajawaid@yahoo.com.