

Saira's Search

Mrs Zarina Aijaz

The imam of our local mosque lived near our house in Rawalpindi. His daughter Saira would often come over to our place to get cold water. I would often chat with her. It turned out that this girl in her teens was not going to school; she could not even read the Arabic alphabet or the Quran.

I was shocked to hear that. I offered to teach her to read the Quran. She happily agreed and regularly started coming to my house in the evenings.

Saira worked her way through the Qaida first. Then she finished reading the Quran, and then read it a second time. She was now reading the Quran beautifully and also learned her prayers and Kalimas (Muslim formulas). She was a keen learner.

She moved from reading Arabic to writing Urdu in no time. The next milestone was learning to stitch! She not only learnt to do it but also started her work at home, earning a little extra money for herself.

This plump and fair skinned girl was a sponge for new learning__ she absorbed it all. If God forbid life presents any difficulties, Saira had a skill that she could fall back on. When Saira had first come to us she was very simple and shy. As she learnt to read, write and stitch, she gained a new poise and confidence.

People often ask me how I managed to make time for Saira, being a working woman who also has a family to take care of. My answer is:I did manage, because Saira is family too, because at that point in time, I was the only window to learning that Saira had. I wanted to leave that window open for her.

Saira was in her teens when she started coming to me to learn. It just goes to show that age is no bar if someone is truly keen to learn something new.

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