

The early morning, and start of a new day, has always been my favorite time. Memories of childhood come back, when visiting my aunt and uncle at their summer home in Wisconsin, my brothers and I would awake early, and at 6:30 or 7:00 we would run barefoot through the dewy grass down to the lake, and have an early morning swim. Our feet were chilled by the time we reached the lakeshore, for nights were cool, and left shining drops of moisture on every blade of grass; our footprints left a trail behind us. The water really felt warm, as we plunged in, and it enveloped our bodies with a soothing, wonderful feeling.

Now, I sit by the poolside at Al Hada hospital, in the mountains near Taif, Saudi Arabia, and reflect on the scene around me. I have been here over one year, and most early mornings I come out here, I am still awed by the lovely scene. A sheer, steep rose-colored mountain arises at the east end of the pool area, the sun is on the other side, and not yet visible but is sending it's bright glow ahead of it. In just one hour from now, it will have succeeded in flashing it's brilliance over me, and the pool. It spreads it's light now, on the marble buildings of Prince Fahad's palace, and guest house, that are majestically standing on top of the mountain across the road from the west end of the pool area. It's brilliance is like a fire, as it is reflected from a large window in the palace.

The air is cool, as we are at about 7000 feet elevation, and a brisk breeze stirs the small trees nearby, making their branches wave a friendly "good morning". As the great friend sun makes a successful climb from behind the east backdrop, it's beams will change the cool breeze to a balmy, warm one - - - such magic!

The sky above is very blue, with wispy white hints of clouds here and there, promising another lovely, near-perfect summer day. The date is June 21, the longest day of the year. But, not only is it beautiful in the mornings here at this time of the year, but even in the winter months. I swam in the pool here, right through those months, early in the morning right after arising. It was like a prayer, offering thanks to the Creator, for the beauty and serenity of the coming day, and the ability for me to enjoy it. At 6:00 a.m. in the winter months, the sky is still dark, it looks like a velvet mantle above, sprinkled with a myriad of stars. The moon was often visible, in it's never ending cycle of growing bigger, then smaller, 'till it was a curved sliver tipped on it's back, the Arab moon! Some mornings, the stars would be fading slowly as I swam back and forth, and I would say "goodbye", as I stepped out of the pool and into the brisk, cold air, "see you tomorrow morning". One winter morning it was windy, cold, and raining, some hail fell as I swam - - but it was brief and not unfriendly, as I knew the moisture was needed on the small junipers and bushes, that manage to exist here and there on that sheer, rosy cliff.

Another time, on a rainy morning, the drops came down heavily, but that doesn't matter, when one is in the water, it is just Mother Nature's shower. A heavy fog was present too, and a wind, that swirled the fog too and fro, tossing it about playfully until it twisted and turned it into a funnel-like shape, and dropped it down into the tennis court area below. By the time I had swam back and forth and watched this wonder of nature, the blue sky was visible above, and another day had dawned.

Am I not lucky, to be able to see these early morning secrets, not visible to those who cling to their pillow and blanket, and emerge into their workday world, with the full, bright glare of daylight enveloping them! Was it cold, in those early winter mornings, stepping out of the cold water? Yes, a chill clings to the body, but the soul is warmed by the lovely feeling of sliding smoothly back and forth in the fluid space of the pool, hardly rippling the water, and knowing the joy of sensing the beauty of mountain, sky and air. A quick brisk rub with towel, and then hot shower, restore warmth to the body, the mind is serene and ready to face the day with pleasure.

Now, as I wrote earlier, the hour has passed, the sun has mounted the top of the cliff, and is warming my body with it's glow. Another miracle, another day!

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