

JOY COMES AFTER THE MOURNING...

**The Odyssey Journey of Sylvia Fakhry
By Donna Varnam**

And the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 35:10

When Sylvia Fakhry arrived in Singapore from Egypt for the Institute of Leadership Formation Odyssey, her heart was as heavy as the luggage she brought with her. Sylvia was grieving the loss of her uncle, Dr. Minister Adel Wahba as well as her dear mother. Cancer had made a recent claim on both their lives. To Sylvia, her uncle was her closest friend and an important mentor in her life. Her mother was her earthly life-line and daily prayer warrior. The loss of these loved ones left Sylvia broken and empty with a deep sense of sorrow and loneliness. She wasn't sure how she would be able to concentrate or contribute to the two-week course that was ahead of her.

Feeling insecure with the expectations to come, Sylvia entered the first day of the Odyssey with a less than enthusiastic attitude for the agenda or toward the fellow sojourners in the class. How could she be released from the mourning that had been consuming her for such a seemingly long time? However, with God in control and others being receptive to her situation, it didn't take long for Sylvia to not only sense the love that she had long missed and yearned for, but to be fascinated by the new challenges introduced.

Sylvia was raised in a Christian home in Minia, Egypt, 245 kilometers south of Cairo. Her family was known all over the city and surrounding areas for their honest and sincere love of people. Both her parents were faithful servants of Jesus Christ and led many to the Lord. Sylvia's senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Fayez Fares, describes Sylvia as one who has inherited the spirit of her parents. Sylvia acknowledges being raised in a Christian home has allowed her the benefits of being blessed by generations of Godly men and women who kept her on a good path of faith at an early age. However, she admits attending the Odyssey has made her application of the Bible more personal and she has a deeper sense of knowing Christ.

As the days of the Odyssey went by, Sylvia began challenging her own potential and commenced to strengthen in what she considered her weaknesses and disabilities. She spent more time with God in prayer, applying the things taught her to her meditation time. She enjoyed opening an ear to each new day and listening and studying what God's word had to say to her personally. She began to think outside the box and was thinking less of her own world and more on growing in God's plan for her life. Her attitude toward others began to change and her self-discipline was qualified and enlarged.

A personal surprise for Sylvia was to learn so much about her body as God's temple. The attitude toward her physical wellness completely changed when she learned new ways to rebuild her body in healthy ways. She would carry the healthy habits back to Egypt and influence her family. The physical wellness process would now become daily habits.

Each new dawn brought something fresh and exciting and Sylvia's grief became replaced with an unexplainable joy. She now uses the precious memories of her uncle and mother as an encouragement to continue her work in prison ministry as well as visiting children cancer patients in the Minia Hospital. Sylvia admits to having suffered in her grief, but now realizes how she lives in her grief speaks to others. She credits the Odyssey for being restored personally, filled spiritually and equipped to serve.

Sylvia continues to study the Odyssey subjects upon her return to Egypt. She is now translating them into Arabic and is enjoying and refreshing her mind with each subject.

Sylvia still has her time of mourning those she has lost, but gives the Odyssey credit for taking a broken vessel and setting her sails on a joyous journey for Christ.