

UNDER A DIFFERENT SKY

BY IFFAT NAWAZ



The thin lines... crossed, stepped on and smothered...

So the other day I was having some asparagus with some fancy cheese while engaged in some conversation with some knowns and unknowns. It was a typical get together of a crowd that made it just a while ago, settled in comfortably in their newly renovated houses, with trendy brick walls inside and antiques and pretty black and whites.

A crowd that offers everything you want- comfort, intellect, pleasure, food, gossip, and unlimited cable in the background. I was catching up with the newly weds, the soon to be weds, the recently divorced, the just became singles, the forever single and, of course, the new mothers.

So the topics ran from the football games, to new places to eat, to baby's baby food and adult baby talks. Slowly guests left, one after another, to catch the next party or to just crash for the night, and I was still sluggish sitting in the corner of the couch, too comfortable to move, talking to friends whom I hadn't seen in a while.

After the weather, the trips planned for 2006, the back aches and the new exercise routines were discussed, the gossiping started. One of us mentioned something about the newly weds and then the other about the soon-to-be weds and then it just poured. "Did you see the size of that rock on her finger," "I heard he has a child from his last marriage" "What? He was married before, I had no idea", "He met her whole family and his family has no idea that she exists" and it went on.

The party had found a new rhythm it seemed. And while I added and enjoyed every bit of this juice I was hit by a *deja vu*...and felt I had been there before, this was way too familiar, way too close to home. This was something I criticized, something I blamed the Bengali community for- the gossips, the talking behind backs, the pretences, being provincial and in others' business. This is something Bengalis get shunned for, left and right, and here I was sitting with a bunch that has never been close to Bengal, sounding and acting almost the same as a bunch of stereotypical aunties chewing paan and forming fairy or witch tales.

So, why are we, as Bengalis, always blamed for being the gossip seeker, for being the gossipers? Is it because we do it tactlessly, unlike the westerns who have gotten better skills at undertaking such practices that allow them, at the end of the day, to escape the blame of being guilty. It's all innocent from what it seems, innocent gossiping about not-so-innocent deeds...The art of gossip is practiced so beautifully here that it's not even easily noticed.

The gossip magazines make millions, the readers feed on Angelina's current and new adopted babies and Jennifer Aniston's breast implantation. The difference is that they call it trash, and leave it in their carelessly kept magazine holder in their bathrooms, degrading them as toilet reads. But they still read the gossip; let it be sitting on a toilet, the words don't change, the desire for tittle-tattle doesn't either.

I always thought people gossip most when there is nothing new and exciting in their own lives to be consumed with. Sure, we are all curious to know news, new happenings, and I will definitely not close my ears to any gossip passing by my direction. It's just the level of it, it's just that a country that can be hooked on "Desperate Housewives" "90210" and reality television shows can not claim to be progressive enough to be beyond gossiping.

So Bengalis...watch and learn.. Aunties, all you got to do is practice the art of gossiping a bit more, be subtle but be aggressive, do it with charm and a straight face, loose the paan and in time, we shall also be professionals.

DENTAL WISE



DR. MAHFUJUL HAQ KHAN BDS, DDS, FSDCE (USA), PhD (Japan), Post Doc. (Japan) Specialised: Crown and Bridge work, and Periodontal plastic surgery (USA) Assistant Professor and Consultant, Department of Dentistry, BIRDEM Hospital.

Dental wise

Dear Dr. M.H. Khan,

This is Maliha, age 14. I had dental cavities (Caries?), which I already filled three years back and we know that most human beings are suffering from dental caries. I have two pet dogs. Though I found no black spot on their teeth and I never thought that they might need to get dental fillings, I wanted some information on animal caries. Do they have milk teeth? I saw on TV once that a dog was being treated by a dentist. Can you tell me how I can take care of my dog's dental health? I am really curious regarding this matter.

Maliha Khan
Gulshan, Dhaka

Hello Maliha,

Nice to hear from you. It's a fact. Most dog owners never take a good look inside their dog's mouth. And that's unfortunate because it is estimated that over 80 percent have significant oral pathology. Dogs get caries, or "cavities," much less commonly than do humans. Cavity treatment in dogs is very similar to

the treatment in people. Dental disease, specifically periodontal disease (Gum disease), is the most common affecting pet dogs and cats. This is an infection of the gums and potentially the other supporting structures of the teeth. Halitosis, or bad breath, is the most common sign of oral disease. Classic "doggy breath" is not necessarily normal. The major cause of halitosis is periodontal disease (Gum Disease).

The growth pattern and structure of our teeth are very similar to those of our dogs. Soon after birth a full set of temporary or deciduous teeth are produced in the same way as children have milk teeth which we often describe as 'sharp needles'. Their shape differs from the permanent teeth which grow through to replace them between the ages of four and six months. One of the best ways to insure optimum oral health is to provide the dog with a well-balanced, meat-based dog food. Brushing the dog's teeth can be a big help, too, but needs to be done almost daily.

There are some signs of dental disease in your pet that may be more subtle. Dogs may preferentially choose softer



foods, play with chew toys less and decline crunchy treats. You may notice your pet chewing more on one side of his mouth. He may chew less in general and this sometimes causes the dog to vomit, seen as undigested, poorly chewed food. Increased salivation, pawing at or rubbing the face can be indications of oral pain.

For further information please visit Dr Khan's website www.aikodental.com

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES



DR. NIGHAT ARA, Psychiatrist, Counsellor and Therapist

Interpreter of Maladies

Dear Dr Nighat,

I am a 21 year old girl. I come from a broken home. When I was just seven, my parents got divorced and since then I have been living with one parent. Throughout my life I have struggled with issues like- fear of being abandoned, fear of commitment, low self-esteem and insecurities. For the last three years I have been in a relationship with a wonderful man who loves me dearly and is sensitive to my needs. But I find myself being mean to him most of the time and undermining him constantly. It's almost like I am bent on sabotaging my relationship; though that is not what I really want. I don't want to continue being this way, and I think I need help. Can you please help me?

Anonymous

Ans : Children coming from broken homes experience various kinds of difficulties in establishing an intimate relationship at a later stage. At age 7, children tend to live in their own little world where they are the center of everything and subconsciously hold themselves responsible for anything that goes wrong around them. It is a very common phenomenon that a child of that age holds herself responsible for the divorce of her parents and starts thinking- "If I were good enough, my parents would have lived together" or "Had I been lovable enough, my parent couldn't have aban-

doned me" etc.

This kind of negative thinking results in low self-esteem. If parents fail to make it clear to their children that their marriage fell apart because of their personal incompatibilities and it has nothing to do with the child, this low self-esteem haunts the child for the rest of his/her life. It is the parent's job to repeatedly ensure the child that s/he is innocent and is lovable to both of them.

If a parent physically or emotionally abandons a child, trusting another person (particularly of that gender) becomes a huge challenge to that child in later life. It takes time to grow out of these negative feelings and sometimes children get stuck in that negative mind frame that tends to rule their subsequent relationships.

Living with one parent also means loss of role modeling by another parent. In some cases, girls who have lost a father figure (and didn't get a substitute) in childhood tend to crave for love and attention from men in their adulthood; this is an unconscious effort to reconstruct the damaged self-image. However, the fear of abandonment (e.g. if my parent who brought me to this world could abandon me like this, who else would be there for me?), insecurity (because the child was abandoned when s/he was the neediest!) makes the task of rebuilding the self-image and recovering from low self-esteem, a difficult job. People who suffer from low self-esteem can be highly critical/cynical of others;

arrogance and spitefulness can be cover-ups for inner discomforts.

Individual counseling sessions, group therapy sessions, special workshops can all be helpful to regain self-esteem. Cognitive behavior therapy helps people to change their negative mind frames. However, these changes usually take place insidiously only in a supportive, safe, therapeutic environment. You are in a relationship with a man who is wonderful, loving and sensitive to your needs. His unconditional support and your self-awareness will be important resources in this journey along the path of recovery. To prevent sabotaging this relationship, "Fake it, till you make it"- self-disclosure to a certain level to make him aware of your struggles, taking responsibility for your personal emotional baggage and owning it, taking steps to recover without displacing it on others, establishing a healthy boundary (neither intrusive nor indifferent!) that provides both of you an adequate personal comfort zone can be useful steps at this stage.

To make this relationship a successful one, you need to work on your trust issues (e.g. using a counselor or therapist in a professional set up within an ethical boundary), and self esteem issues (there are specific mental exercises that help people to rebuild their damaged self-image). Self-love and learning to accept the past (where you don't have any control any more!) will empower you to love another person.

BY THE WAY

Back to home cooking

DON'T let all the hard work of the mobile courts go in vain, make your own snacks at home. A little home cooking does none any harm, especially if you mainly rely on natural products. And it will actually make the meal more special for your family.