Facts of Life

RICHA JHA

MY son, the soon-to-be-birthday boy, unfolded his wish list. He said, pointing at the display window of one of the fanciest shops in town, "I want that as my birthday present number one." I strained to look in the direction of his object of desire, and my head spun. If my understanding of his desire was in sync with his, it would spell bankruptcy for The Hubby and me! I shook my head, and told him politely that it was clearly out of the question.

We've all been through this, haven't we? There come several occasions when you have to make sure that a firm no from your side should be read as such on the other side too. Fortunate are those parents whose children don't question them (or are they, really?), but with my child, fighting for his rights is a daily jaunt laced in appropriate legalese, which make strong sense on most occasions. Which side finally wins depends on whose arguments are stronger. Human rights begins at home!

I said no. "That, my darling son, is not possible. Actually, anything inside this shop is out of question. So think of something else."

The extra precocious sensors in the boy's system, naturally, got alerted. So he persisted with added emphasis. That, that, and nothing else.

I said ok, then I go with 'nothing else'. Is that ok with you?

When persuasion fails, he usually resorts to tears. Which he did, along with some basic hysterics murmuring, "You are a un-loving mamma," and so on.

The crisis unresolved, we headed home, but once there, I decided it was time I sat with him and explained a few facts of life. Five is not that young an age.

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I called him near me, hugged him, and said, "Do you want to know why I can't buy that for you?" His faced beamed instantly at the very mention of the taboo-object!

On a white sheet, I drew out the road, a hut, a small house, a slightly bigger house, a five storied apartment, sky scraper, and a huge bungalow. Manned each of them with few human figures and cars, and explained, starting with people on the roads, how people lived in each case.

My tutorial was impromptu, but pretty structured: that you need money to buy food, chocolates, ice cream, clothes, TV, tickets to go inside Wonderland Park, cartoon DVDs, books. And toys. Not everyone has the same number of takas in the house. People with no house have very little money, and therefore, they need to request other people to give them some. People living in huts may do this, this, this, and this to earn money, which is only slightly more than the first set of people mentioned. Therefore, they may not be able to buy the kind of toys that he has in his toy box. To drive home this view, I successfully managed to give him specific examples of the kind of toys that could possibly be bought for the children in those huts.

We made good progress, taking him through the successive sketches of houses and growing heaps of takas, and the growing numbers and sizes of wheeled toys for the young and old alike. I showed him where we belonged in the scheme of 'housing'. He was visibly excited at finally having reached our slot!

He had his questions at each stage, mainly enquiring about the placement prospects of the entire universe of