To My Black Bearded Baba

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My father has never done things that generally every other father does for their children. He never took us on shopping sprees, never surprised us on our birthdays with some glitzy gift and never bothered to help us in our study. For us, Ma has been the one who would do these things and Baba was always there only to have fun with, to play with and laugh along with. Baba's expression of love is different. For example, during our birthday parties he would make crowns for every single guest or put up a colourful background, that he personally created, which would say 'Happy birthday, Dear X!' As we grew older, discovering many of our friends finding it difficult to communicate with their father, my siblings and I were busy braiding Baba's beard or making him wear black sunglasses and golden chain, pretending that he was *Baker Bhai*. As I grew up, I started realizing my father could be the greatest father without having to buy me a doll house.

Baba does not buy us fancy gifts, but he does amazing things that earns him gold stars in the 'Good Father' category. Being an artist he paints his creativity on our drab clothes. We go to him with some plain boring outfit and ask him to paint around the neckline or on the sleeves or wherever he likes. Our demand is simple; make it beautiful. And he does. He paints his daughters' clothes with the same importance and dedication as he would to his most prized artwork. All throughout my college life, my friends and professors would compliment me on my outfits. "Baba has painted it," I would reply with pride. Compliments make me shy, but at times such as these I feel proud of my possession, my Baba. Baba-designed dresses are something very precious to us. Once, for our class party, he painted a kameez for me and one for my friend. As he painted on the final stroke, it turned out that her dress was prettier than mine. I ranted, screamed and cried, I remember him fixing the whole dress, patiently working on it till I was satisfied. I have always wondered how he does that.

He would stand in a crowd, watching with childlike curiosity the activities of a snake charmer or be engrossed in conversation with a fruit seller. He could also be collecting a dry leaf or some wild flowers if he finds them on his way back home. Every little thing makes Baba happy, that is one priceless lesson I have learnt from him.

Baba is a very people's person; his entertaining and friendly demeanor makes him a favourite among everyone. From the rickshaw puller to the fish seller to the guy who binds his paintings, everyone is his friend. When he and my brother go for Jummah prayers, my brother would always come back home before him. Why? Because it takes Baba 30 minutes to finish a five minute walk, as he *has* to talk to every person who greets him or whom he knows. He would stand in a crowd, watching with childlike curiosity the activities of a snake charmer or be engrossed in conversation with a fruit seller. He could also be collecting a dry leaf or some wild flowers if he finds them on his way back home. Every little thing makes Baba happy, that is one priceless lesson I have learnt from him.

Baba has not ever given us advice on our life nor created guidelines stating what to do or what not to do. Yet we have learnt a lot from him. He teaches us to laugh no matter what, he teaches us to love the moment that we are living in and most importantly,