

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hope for autistic children

DR. LEEDY HOQUE

ON the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, I would like to share my experience in bringing up my son Aadil.

As an infant Aadil was the picture of health and we were unaware of the tremendous ordeal we were soon to face. He was happiest in the garden, stroking long strands of grass. When he was two, I was concerned about his lack of speech. He would watch a nursery rhyme video for hours, and yet he would not look at me when I called his name. He began to tear paper and if obstructed, he would hide under his grandmother's bed, and continue to tear paper all the more vigorously. Toys never appealed to him. I was at a loss as how to care for him. My days and nights merged into an endless nightmare. He would smear faeces all over himself or anything near him. If I was not cleaning, I was busy trying to control his terrible tantrums. These tantrums became more difficult to manage when he began to attack his sister, Shaoli.

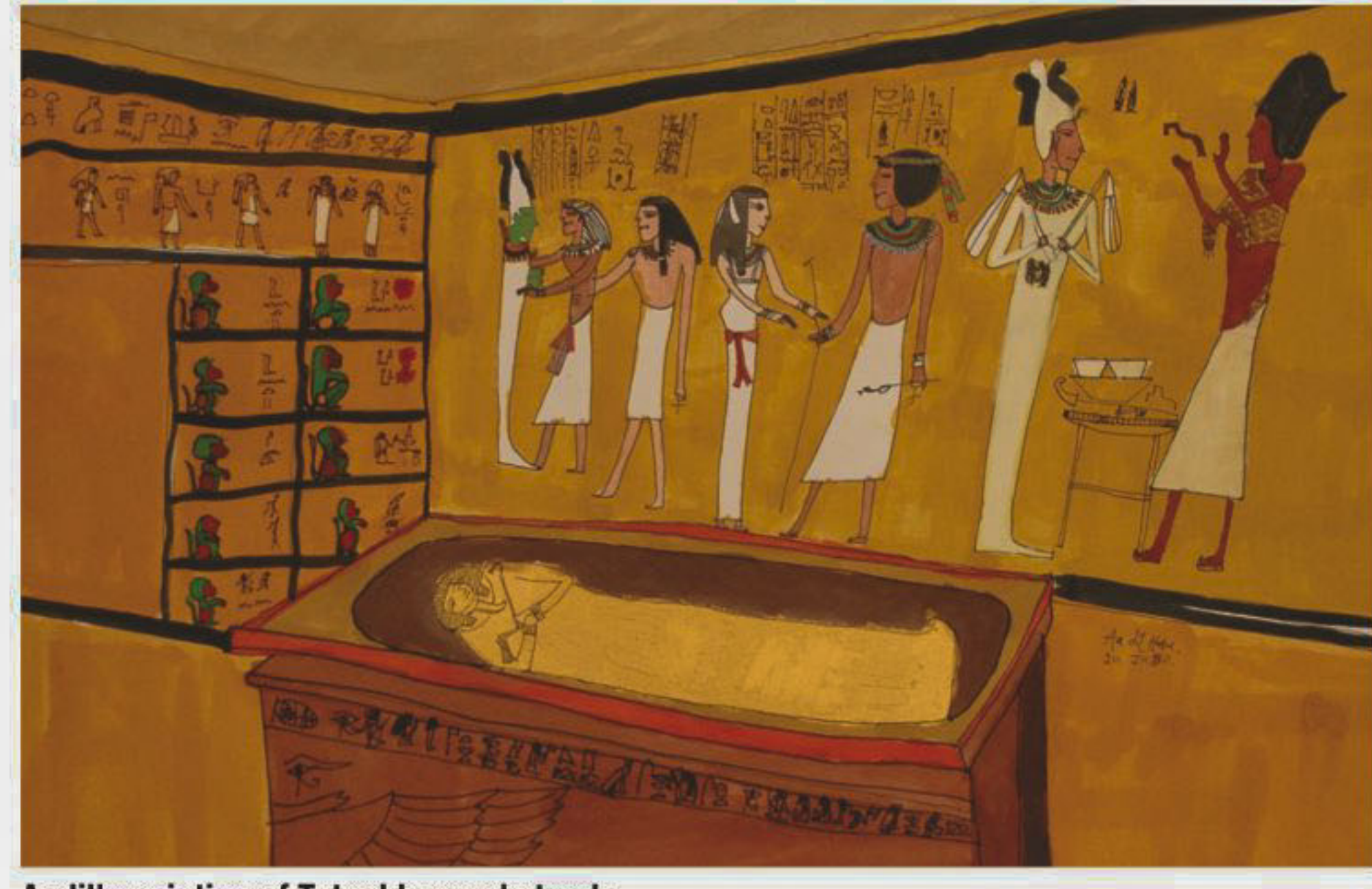
Out of sheer desperation, I left for Oxford, England, in 1994 with my mother, Shaoli and Aadil (then aged six and four respectively). Aadil was diagnosed with autism and was enrolled at the local autistic unit. His teacher Judy Holdsworth would work with him at the unit, home and a mainstream school. However, Aadil's aggression escalated to such extremes that I had to lock Shaoli in her bedroom or send her to my brother Tipu's house to protect her. It was only when I learned a different approach while on a training programme called "Son Rise" at the Option Institute in the USA that the situation

changed. This approach, unlike any other at the time, centred on following the child's actions and entering his world. For the first time we were tearing paper with him! On my return to Oxford, I set up a home based educational and therapeutic programme for Aadil with a small group of highly motivated teachers including Judy Holdsworth, Emily Cohen, Dan Fedorowich, Anton Keyte and others. The programme was supported by the Oxford local education and social services, and monitored by Richard Brooks of Oxfordshire Autism Services.

A breakthrough occurred soon after we started Aadil's programme. Aadil became fascinated with images of ancient Egypt, which he first saw in a history book when he was six. This fascination was harnessed to teach him to speak, read, write, draw and paint. His hyperactivity and challenging behaviour improved considerably since being on a strict sugar-free and gluten- (wheat) and casein- (milk) free diet.

In 2000, we returned to Bangladesh and the following year, he was admitted to SWAC (Society for the Welfare of Autistic Children) which he still attends.

Aadil has settled well in Bangladesh. He has a routine involving rigorous physical exercise and daily sensory therapy. He still requires guidance with self-help skills like combing his hair. Dedicated loving home tutors and attendants give him tremendous support in the areas of art, music, Bangla and religious studies. During leisure time, he paints while listening to music, sings his favourite songs or reads books from his extensive home library. He has a vast



Aadil's painting of Tutankhamun's tomb

collection of European and, more recently, Indian classical music. In addition to Egyptian themes, he now paints in Moghul styles. He visits the British Council library every Saturday and enjoys outings to various galleries, museums, bookshops and restaurants. The highlight of his week is 'Shurer Jadu' and 'Ronger Jadu', music and art classes for autistic children at Chhayanaut. I started these programmes in 2008 with the help of his home tutors, in order to provide an opportunity for these children to enjoy and express themselves in an environment free of expectation.

A solo display of Aadil's art, organised by his teachers in Oxford when he was ten, inspired him to have more exhibitions. He has to his credit several solo art exhibitions here, including his first in 2002 at Ariel Centre followed by "Devotion" at the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts in 2005. In 2007, he jointly exhibited ("Retrospect") with Shaoli in the Shilpangan gallery. Drik Gallery was the venue for his exhibition "For the Love of Egypt" in 2009.

In 2005, he was awarded a gold medal by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture for his watercolour entry "Golden Cleopatra" in an international art

competition. The award was presented to him by Begum Khaleda Zia, who was the prime minister of Bangladesh at the time.

Aadil's dream came true in 2007 when he visited his beloved Egypt. We fulfilled his every wish, taking him from Alexandria in the north, following the length of the Nile to the magnificent temple at Abu Simbel in the south. He even met his hero Dr. Zahi Hawass, the famous Egyptologist of modern times, who was amazed at seeing Aadil's portrait of Dr. Hawass in the brochure from his exhibition at the Bengal Gallery.

It is well-recognised that the treatment and management of autism must have a multidirectional approach. The combined effort of parents, teachers and experts working closely together can encourage communication and interaction. Whether verbal or non verbal, higher or lower functioning, there are basic approaches that will help each child reach their full potential. A structured routine and use of visual aids provide security and help the child understand his world much better. Sensory and dietary issues must be addressed with help from professionals. Medication should be reserved for extreme challenging behaviour, sleep disorders or attention problems. The learning process must be enjoyable and meaningful for the child, free from pressure from parents and teachers. Of paramount importance is our attitude towards them. This must be one of unconditional acceptance and our goal should not be expecting a cure but to understand and support a lifelong condition.

The writer is an autism specialist. She can be reached at leedyhoque@hotmail.com.

A letter to the apple of my i

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Dear iPhone 5,

I am writing to you knowing full well that you or your girlfriend Siri will never even look at this, because honestly, I don't know how to talk to you anymore. I have tried, oh how I have tried, to understand your mood swings: why you choose to just shut off my Whatsapp in the middle of a conversation with my baby who lives thousands of miles away; why you just will not let me 'like' anything on Facebook, and then on other occasions, you just send off half finished messages while I am typing, making my boss wonder whether it is sheer intellectual regression or substance abuse that makes me write things like 'Dwarf boss I will be a little latex...'

And that is not all. There has been the humiliation you have inflicted on me when I forced octogenarians and toddlers to pose for that rare intergenerational picture, only to find the camera locked and rudely stating: "You cannot take any more pictures because you have no storage". And when I tried to delete 'apps' to clear storage, you did not

allow me to do that either. Because apparently, I am not allowed to delete some of the apps you have decided I can't do without, you control freak!

Many of your haters have asked why, after all this trauma, (I have to restart you every time I want to check 'messenger', you won't even shut off) have I stuck with you. Honestly, I don't know. I have attachment problems. Once I like someone, I just can't 'unlike'. It's a major flaw in the model I belong to, I know, for it makes me a naive, gullible fool who allows a lot of nonsense. But please give me some credit, dear. I am insanely loyal, especially to your mother 'Apple', the original sin to some, to others the original masterpiece. Yes, even quite a few decades ago, I was introduced to her through the rows of desktops in the computer room of my university, deliciously called Mackintoshes. It was probably the first time I had even seen a desktop, let alone touch it. I was amazed what a mouse could do and how mere clicks opened up a horizon of possibilities. Despite the umpteen times I lost hours of typing (being a two finger typist) because I forgot to 'save', I didn't let go of your mom, Apple, and patiently learnt the magic of CTRLs.

Then when I came back home to join a newspaper, guess what I found? Apple computers in the compose section! While many of our colleagues just sent in their handwritten or typed matter to be 'composed', then 'read' to incorporate the handwritten corrections, I could smugly do my own corrections on the screen. Kids, don't roll your eyes; this was in the early nineties when email was born.

Now where was I? Oh yes, the apple story - it's funny, the recurrence of Apple in my life. When I got married, I was delighted to find another Mackintosh desktop in the house I moved into - apparently I had tied the knot with another Apple aficionado! Years later, I was presented with one of Apple's later, sleeker, alluring progeny - a featherweight laptop called MacBook Air.

By the time I actually got to you, dearest iPhone 5, it was at least a decade or two and after many lesser suitors. Not because I didn't want you, I did, with all my heart. I just couldn't afford you. Then by some stroke of luck, you were bestowed upon me. Since then I have tried to nurture you as well as I could. Yes, I let you slip through my fingers a couple of times which slightly injured you - but we spent thousands we could ill afford just to get

your buttons to work again.

And yes, I do acknowledge all that you have done for me. The endless Viber chats with my confidante who lives far away - you made it seem like she was right beside me; the Whatsapp updates from my child (*yes ma, I am home, have not joined a satanic cult or had my tongue pierced*); being able to check the 'likes' on my pictures 24-7; and most of all, having the luxury of writing an entire column on your 'Notes' app and then emailing the doc to the office while waiting in line for three hours, stranded at an airport in some Nordic country.

All this I am grateful for, but now the relationship has gone a bit sour. I can see the flashes of rebelliousness, contempt even, as you just refuse to let me get into your music, saying horrible things like: "You have no space (almost like you are too fat and I am no longer attracted to you), you have no connection, get more storage space, manage your settings - just go do something, I am just not turned on babe." Well you are no spring chicken either, honey. If you want to know why I am still with you - well, it's because you happened to be an Apple offspring, ok? Apple represents originality, innovation, brilliance. And now Apple represents people's

right to privacy. Because Apple has stood up to the US government, refusing to create an app to unlock a cell phone used by a terrorist. It wasn't an easy thing to do, you know - a lot of people hate Apple for being so uppity and even unpatriotic by not allowing the FBI to open up vital information on its device for its investigation. Of course, the FBI found a way to do it anyway - all the more reason, says Apple, that they stuck to their principle to keep their client's most personal information confidential, a reminder that we must stand up for our right to privacy, whatever little we have left of it.

Yes, so that's why, despite your ridiculous noncooperation movement and the misunderstandings you have caused between me and my loved ones, I will stand by you (perhaps in a slightly more updated avatar). You may be called snooty, promoting elitism and yes, you are unforgiving and high maintenance. But one cannot replace the original Kohinoor with any other jewel. Most of all, despite all your aggressive rivals and detractors, ultimately you belong to - Apple - a family that has stood up for what is right.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Op-ed, The Daily Star.

BABY BLUES
BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

ANY IDEA HOW LONG THIS IS GOING TO TAKE?
YOU CAN'T HURRY HOPSCOTCH, DADDY.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Informal talk
- 6 Antlered animal
- 10 Hue
- 11 Jeweler's unit
- 13 Not oblivious
- 14 Knock for a loop
- 15 Writer Stanislaw
- 16 Make mistakes
- 18 Singer Torme
- 19 Mishandle a situaiton
- 22 Zodiac cat
- 23 Irritate
- 24 Storybook elephant
- 27 Kitchen gadget
- 28 Infamous czar
- 29 Look upon
- 30 Accept blame for a crime
- 35 Squeak stopper
- 36 Cool, to jazzmen
- 37 Tell tales
- 38 Blizzard bit
- 40 Conjure up
- 42 Flu symptom
- 43 California griddler
- 44 Copenhagen native

DOWN

- 1 Burn with water
- 2 Inferior
- 3 Texas landmark
- 4 Neither follower
- 5 Entrance-way employee
- 6 Frighten
- 7 Woolen cap
- 8 Language of biblical times
- 9 Graceful antelope
- 12 Bank worker
- 17 Letter after pi
- 20 Runway sight
- 21 Short
- 24 Took on, as work
- 25 Made use (of)
- 26 Sweet Turkish treat
- 27 Pool part
- 29 That woman
- 31 On that spot
- 32 Unaccompanied
- 33 Cared for
- 34 Lusty looks
- 39 Boxer Norton
- 41 Compete

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

VATS SAGA
MEDIC PLODS
AGORA REEVE
LORELEI SEA
TUE EGGHUNT
STRONG OPTS
DECKS
TAIO EASTER
EGGROLL ALI
NAN ALPACAS
STOCK EMOTE
EERIE NIMES
SEAN NEAR

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