

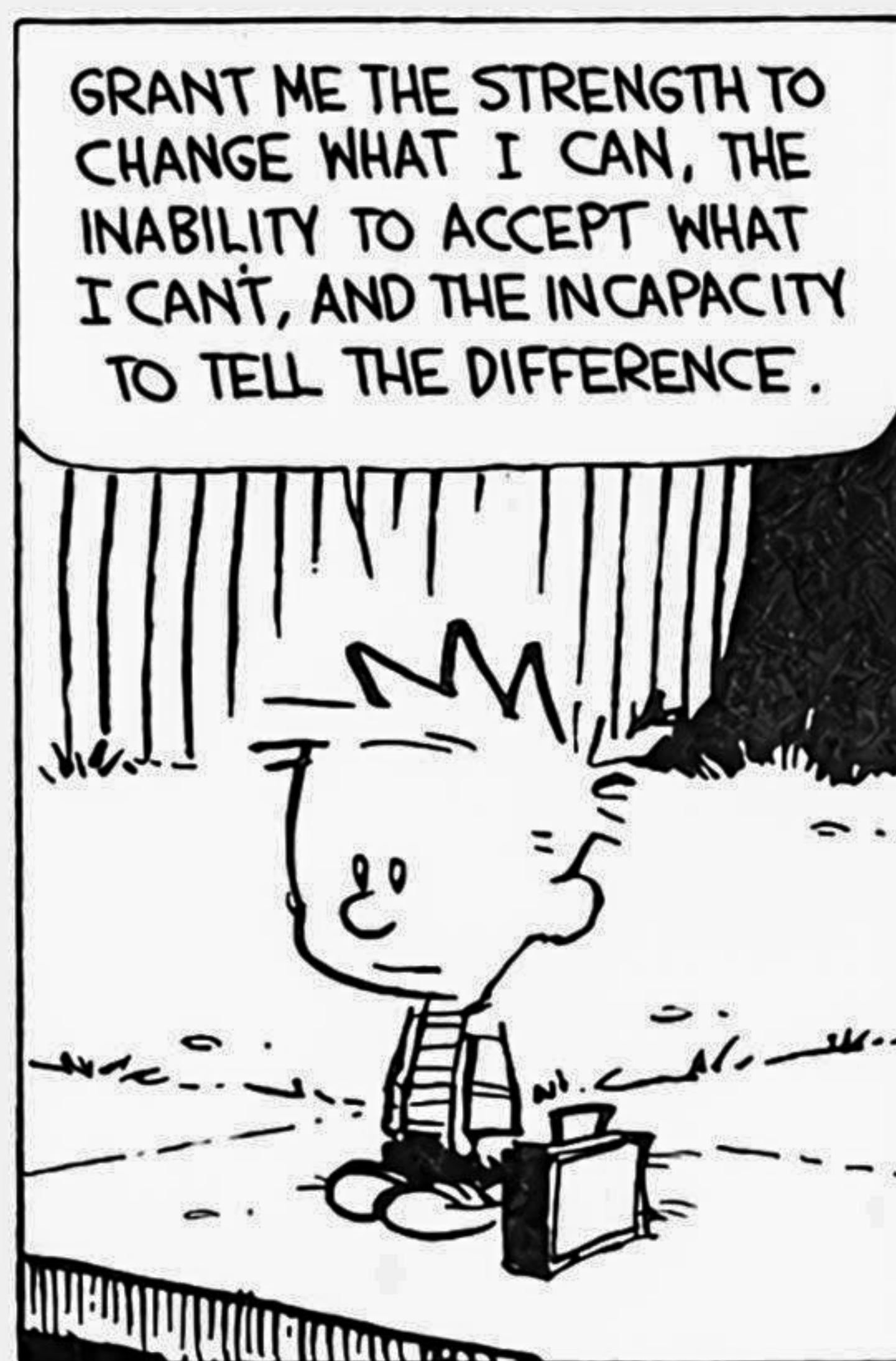
Can you really do anything you want to?

SHOAIB AHMED SAYAM

There's a prevalent narrative which states that people are capable of doing whatever they put their minds to, that following your passion is paramount to achieving your dreams. As good as it feels to be hopeful for the future and be inspired, let's step back and contemplate on this notion.

People who are well-off do not have to think about the financial burdens that average individuals have to bear. They don't have to worry about next month's rent, the food they eat or the luxuries which make life easier. In other words, they have the freedom to pursue the things they are interested in with no financial obstacles. They can go to private schools and universities to get high quality education, go abroad to broaden their horizons, maybe even get into a luxury sport like golf or F1 racing. After all, Bill Gates' parents were quite well-off, they knew Warren Buffet so it's pretty evident. This by no means undermines Gates' achievements, intelligence and hard work, but he did have the best facilities to hone those qualities. This is not an attack either, he himself talked about the luck of the draw in his Stanford commencement speech.

Now, compare that to people who are from villages where school teachers themselves don't know their subjects properly, where everyone has to worry about the electricity, where food is dependent on the harvest. Would you tell them to follow their passion? For them, the best case scenario is to get into a public university and study with minimal cost, get a stable job and send money back home. Their goal is



to support their family, to provide their parents with medical care and their siblings with good education. They don't care if they have to go to a mind numb-

ing job five days a week. Would you then tell them that they could achieve so much more?

Prominent studies have shown that stress induced by poverty affects early brain development. We are no strangers to the lottery of birth, we can't control the surroundings we're born into. The wealthiest families in the world will keep on cruising through life because of the accumulated wealth passed down through generation. Money has a snowball effect, the more you have, the more you can invest.

But what about all the rags to riches stories like Jack Ma and Elon Musk? This can be explained with survivorship bias. We only hear about the people who have made it, not the millions of others who have failed. Can we at least say that it's possible because someone has done it? Sure, but the probabilities are against us.

So, we have no hope, do we? You see, the problem is actually how we measure success. The person who is supporting their family is successful. The person who is creating amazing art without earning a penny is successful. The one who is learning more from work than the one who is bunking classes is successful. Sure, money is an indicator of success, but there are other indicators too. Comparing between people who come from different backgrounds is quite silly, don't you think? But that's exactly what we do. It doesn't make sense to compare goals and achievements of people who are different in their own ways, what makes sense is to identify who you are and what you need and to just keep moving forward.

Woman vs. Street

TASNIM ODRIKA

On today's episode, I shall be venturing into the streets of Dhaka to get from point A to point B. For those of you who are unaware, the streets are a battlefield. There are creatures lurking around on the streets in these parts that ogle you, leer at you, grope you, shout obscenities at you, etc. The list is truly endless. Even so, they somehow keep coming up with newer ways to distress you. My challenge today will be to walk around 4 blocks along these streets without losing my mind and keeping a straight face.

As my journey started, keeping a straight face seemed to be the most difficult feat. With so many people staring, I constantly felt like there was something on my face. Was I wearing my clothes inside out? Did the video



that I posted on YouTube when I was 13 suddenly go viral? I just want answers!

Walking also sort of felt like playing a video game where you had to constantly dodge creatures that intentionally shove you. If you get shoved, you lose a point. Lucky for me, I was on an easy difficulty level street. Also, what they gain from these shoving is beyond my tiny brain.

As my journey progressed, and I ventured deeper into the streets, and unsurprisingly, things started getting more difficult. Now, I met with creatures that not only stared and shoved but they also yelled and told me how

I should live my life or what they thought of me. These creatures had also mastered the art of staring and nothing you said or did would be successful in moving their fixated eyes from you. I tried staring back only to have the creatures leer at me.

After what seemed like ages, I had managed to reach my destination. Whether my sanity remained intact or not is a completely different story.

Tasnim Odrika is having an existential crisis at the moment and doesn't really know who she is anymore. Send her compliments at odrika_02@yahoo.com