



My parents are ageing and it scares me

My mother and I are very alike; we usually brave fevers and colds like it's nothing, but recently, she's been getting sick more frequently. She is still an amazing multitasker, yet I can see the freshly formed age spots when she looks at me while she does ten things at once.

AZRA HUMAYRA

It's 2006, and I am five years old. I fall asleep in front of the television on a weekend on the wooden sofa set that every middle-class family in Dhaka seems to have. I don't have to worry about much, so sleep comes quite quickly and, eventually, I wake up ever so slowly at nine in the morning.

But what is this? How am I on my bed? I swear I slept on the sofa; this has to be magic. It indeed was; the magic was my father. He carried me without stirring me from my stupor.

Now, times have changed. Every year, my parents' footsteps get lighter; they seem to shrink. They occupy less and less space. It is a difficult fact to come to terms with.

I always complained to my parents about why they couldn't come to my sports events. My parents used to work as if the next Great Depression was almost upon us. It took a lot of growing up to understand that all the work my parents were doing was for my brother's and my sake. But still, that little girl in the back of my mind refuses to understand this at the age of 25.

Even if they couldn't always come to see me during the much-coveted sports day, they made sure to take us out on weekends to play zones. I knew if I got hurt, I could run to my

parents, and they would carry me like I was lighter than specks of dust.

My parents' age wasn't as evident to me because I could always see them functioning healthily, like the healthy people they were. Even their grey hair didn't bother me because I didn't pay enough attention. But it all hit me when my father was scheduled for cataract surgery. I thought only old people got those, but there I was with my father, running from one room to another before the surgery.

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It is extremely difficult to get used to my parents' age when I have been so used to them being strong and healthy. They always feel like they have to materialise out of thin air when their children need them, but the years have taken a toll on their bodies. The wrinkles are deeper, and the knee pains are beginning to get in the way.

As the years run by, it will be tougher to see them getting weaker, but I have to remember that they are getting used to the same fact as well. They now like to stay home as much as they can and enjoy the slow life, which they

did not have the luxury of living when they were spirited and young (I blame capitalism for that). The age spots scare me, but I have to accept those pesky little brown spots even though I don't want to.

There was this one particular day when my mother made peace with her age, though not without some theatre. For years, I had been the designated plucker of the stray grey hairs in her brows. But this year, the greys staged a full invasion. She handed me the tweezers and then paused. To pluck them all would leave her with a bald spot. With a huff and a laugh, she waved me off, declaring, almost regally, that it was time to "let them flourish".

One day, I might have to carry my parents the way they once carried me from the sofa to my bed. The thought feels strange, like the world turning upside down, but maybe that is what love does; it rearranges the weight we hold for each other. They taught me how to be cared for; now I must learn how to care back.

Age is creeping in with grey brows, aching knees, and bottles of calcium tablets, and we laugh about it because otherwise we might cry.

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In our algorithm-centric lives, we must extend our empathy

Every time a tragedy shakes the country, there appears to be a group of people, most of whom we primarily see on our screens, who seem to remain unaffected. I have seen this pattern repeat in tandem – the Bailey Road fire, the July Mass Uprising, and recently, the Milestone tragedy. While mourning has continued to cling on to this country like a shadow, these people go on about their lives, continuing to post images of them hanging out with friends and lounging around coffee shops. I fail to grasp the insensitivity and disrespect.

ANICA BUSHRA RAHMAAN

It makes me recall a conversation I had with a friend last year in July. In contrast to the battlefield our country had devolved into, then – bleeding under a sky which refused to keep quiet – it felt as though she was completely unfazed. She simply continued to share images from her trip, without a single mention of what was happening back home. When I confronted her about it, she claimed that she didn't want negativity to taint her precious peace. The conversation, while necessary, was futile. It merely reinforced how intently some people hold on to their bubble of privilege.

Some may call it virtue signalling. However, when any sort of misfortune floods the country, choosing not to share bits of their unperturbed lives on social media is the bare minimum. It's



not radical to demand silence, if not compassion, when tragedy strikes. It's about being respectful enough not to be louder than the cries of death, to not disregard the weight of loss.

In this day and age, most of us resort to social media and online platforms to receive updates. Hence, the image of someone lounging about anywhere, which is seen almost immediately after attempting to make sense of harrowing developments, is not just bad timing; it is a failure to read the room, which makes it downright disconcerting.

This begs the question: Have we grown so desensitised to every atrocity that takes place across the globe? Coming across people we personally know – those who are just like us – demonstrating such behaviour is deeply infuriating. Ignoring tragedies does not make them any less real. A tragedy cannot merely be reduced to a minor inconvenience for some.

I feel as though behaviour like this particularly stings when it comes from people our age. We should know better than most the vital role social media plays in circulating news, how it can help in identifying missing children, how it can make

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the process of sourcing blood donations relatively easier, and how a newsfeed can disseminate real-time developments. I am left to wonder if grief ceases to matter unless it's our own. Nonetheless, we must remind ourselves that protecting one's peace should not come at the cost of being tone-deaf.

Sometimes we simply must observe and keep up, even if it's uncomfortable. Sometimes, the world demands our discomfort. It might disrupt our mental peace, but that's what being human entails. The price of empathy cannot be compensated with anything else. The least one could do is at least offer silence. The world does not stop when disaster strikes. However, as the saying goes, there is a time and place for everything.

Some of us might have the luxury of moving on, of course. But in order to do that, we must first reckon with what has transpired. Nonetheless, it seems as though some aren't willing to extend their empathy even to such a small extent. I am not asking for constant mourning, and I also recognise that some people grieve in different ways, but there's a fine line between silence and ignorance.

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The pitfalls of wanting to stay productive during semester breaks

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

As a university student, the world feels like it's getting more competitive with each passing day. It feels as if every unused or under-utilised moment is a missed opportunity to gain an edge on your academics or future professional life.

With the rise of so many different ways to stay productive, including, but not limited to, online courses, internships, part-time jobs, and personal projects, many university students are no longer just using their semester breaks to unwind. Instead, they are choosing to hustle through these breaks.

This productivity drive, for the most part, stems from both internal and external expectations in an achievement-oriented society.

During semester breaks, there isn't any coursework to worry about, but for many, that empty space quickly becomes a breeding ground for anxiety if it's not filled with something "productive". Scrolling through LinkedIn or hearing about a friend's achievement can further trigger an immediate sense of falling behind.

This pressure to constantly be working toward the next big milestone, even during traditional rest periods, indicates that university students, by and large, have become part of a culture that prioritises constant achievements over balanced lifestyles.

That being said, a semester break spent learning a new skill, honing existing ones, or completing internships or projects does offer benefits for future career prospects.



ILLUSTRATION: SANJANA SABAH KHAN

For many students, these break periods provide opportunities to explore career interests without the competing demands of academic coursework. This exploration can play a role in making significant academic decisions, such as changing majors or choosing which minors to pursue.

In addition, for a lot of students, working during semester breaks provides financial support that they

may have to depend on to fund their education. Beyond that, a purposeful approach to breaks that includes some planned activities can provide a healthy middle ground between the rigid scheduling of the semester and the complete absence of structure.

The real problem, however, arises when semester breaks become extensions of academic pressure rather than periods of rest and recovery.

There is always the looming risk of extending and deepening the burnout already caused by the semester. After all, how fruitful would it be to start a new semester physically drained and mentally exhausted?

It is also important to consider the diminishing returns to continuous productivity. This is shown in a seven-year longitudinal study of summer programming, where students attending consecutive summer terms showed 19 percent lower GPA gains in subsequent academic years compared to peers who balanced work and rest. This shows that an excessive focus on remaining productive during semester breaks can actually backfire.

For students, it is important to find the right balance, like setting intentional but limited goals, managing expectations and setting boundaries, and breaking down goals into small, attainable chunks. This approach helps maintain a sense of purpose during breaks and protects against the exhaustion that comes with overcommitment.

Rest does not have to be at odds with productivity, and when we start looking at rest itself as a productive activity, things start making a bit more sense.

Reference:

RAND Summer Learning Series (July 2023). *A Longitudinal Analysis of Outcomes from the National Summer Learning Project*.

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