

# A DAUGHTER REMEMBERS

By Shyrose Jaffer-Dhalla

May 29, 1993. I heard my name being called very gently. As I opened my eyes to darkness, I realized it was my brother Mohamad's voice. It was an eerie sound at 3:00 A.M.; there was none of that sense of urgency that one would expect to hear at so early an hour. "Wake up," he said almost mournfully outside the closed door. "They just called from Dubai...Daddy's very ill."

Just two weeks earlier, my parents had flown to Dubai to visit my sister. They were to continue on to Dar-es-salaam for a business trip. Daddy, who had suffered a heart attack last year, at the age of 56, had been given a clean bill of health by his cardiologist, and permission to travel. So it felt strange now, to hear the fear in my brother's voice. "Daddy must be just having those bouts of chest pains", I thought to myself. His doctor always admonished Daddy when he complained of chest pains. "You'll just have to learn to live with it, Mr. Jaffer", he would say.

I opened my bedroom door and looked at my brother's sad face. His shoulders were slumped, and his head low as if he had had some time to think before he woke me up. As if he feared the worse. "We have to pray," he pleaded gently.

He said that the phone call from my sister had been brief. She was calling from the hospital where Daddy was seriously ill, and she would update us soon. Together, my brother and I went to wake my other sister. Within minutes, both were on their *musallas* feverishly praying, with *tasbeehs* in their hands. I sat numbly at the kitchen table. I knew something was horribly wrong. There was no way my sister in Dubai would be calling from the hospital; it is virtually impossible to make international calls from Rashid Hospital. I knew that from experience.

"Daddy, please hold on..." I whispered softly. "I need you so much, Daddy." Just a month earlier, Daddy had chosen a life

partner for me and witnessed my engagement. There was so much I needed to learn from him, so much guidance I would soon need, as I would embark on a new chapter in my life. I needed my father's reassuring hand on my head, gently and symbolically protecting me with that all encompassing shade of indulgent love and benevolence that he had always given to me, his last born. I wanted my Daddy to keep me and his little girl forever. He had to live. I needed him.

And yet, I felt an inexplicable sense of foreboding. I could taste the fear in my mouth, even as I convinced myself that everything was alright. None of us had the courage to pick up the phone and call Dubai. We wanted to hold on to that moment of not knowing the worst for a little longer. I looked at the phone for a long time before I resolved to pick up the phone. I dialed my sister's Dubai residence number. It was as I feared; my sister answered the phone.

"What's going on...? You said you were calling from the hospital!" my words were tumbling out faster and faster with growing alarm. I heard my mother crying in the background. My sister struggled to answer me through her tears. "We couldn't tell you the news just like that..."

For a moment, everything went deafeningly quiet, and then I heard the words that would forever change my life. "He's gone..."

The sound of my mother's wails as she called out for my father was the most chilling sound I had ever heard in the world. The phone fell from my hands, and I screamed out for my father and blindly ran into my brother and sister's outstretched arms. No words were spoken, for we had all guessed the worst before I had called. We had already sensed that Daddy was no longer with us. We sobbed there together, holding each other in the middle of the night, thousands of miles away from our mother and two sisters. Even now, the memories of the helpless feelings I felt those in those moments make me cry. It was 3:00 a.m., the world around us was asleep, but in that tiny kitchen the three of us were engulfed in a grief unlike anything we had ever experienced before. All we could do was walk

around blindly, hold onto each other and cry. There was nothing we could do, absolutely nothing we could do to change the fact. We had lost our father. He was gone forever. We would never see him again.

My sister took Daddy's picture from the mantelpiece, and clutched it like a child. We all sat around the picture, and caressed the image of his face. Can a person really leave your life so abruptly? Would we really never hear his voice calling us? Such things only happened to other people...we had never imagined that OUR happy, loving family could ever be struck by tragedy. Daddy still had not worn the tie we had given him the previous month, when we had celebrated his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday. We sat staring at each other in shock and disbelief.

I found a Quran and looked at the pages through my blinding tears. I will never forget the chill that went through my body as I began to recite. Never before had the word "Yaseen" evoked such feelings of sorrow and pain in our hearts. The mournful sound of that word brought to realization the fact that we were actually reciting Surah-e-Yaseen for our own father. Our dear, kind, sweet Daddy was gone.

Within minutes, relatives who had been notified started arriving. Cousins, uncles, and aunts from all areas of Toronto were by our side. By the time we all joined together for Fajr namaaz, my dear father had already been buried thousands of miles away, in a cemetery in Dubai. That soft body we hugged, that person we cherished, was buried in sand.

Our house was soon filled with grieving friends and relatives. It was a scene that I would never have imagined in our house when I went to bed the night before. Life can change so dramatically, so unpredictably.

How many of us take each other for granted. How many of us fight with our parents, and expect to wake up the next day to be able to apologize to them? We expect our parents to be present throughout all the important milestones in our lives, to grow old gracefully around us, and to bounce our children on their knees, someday. But only Allah (s.w.t.c.a.b.)

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side our fate. If only we could take a moment to appreciate our parents, to thank them, to hug them, to apologize for all the times we have hurt them! I had spoken to my father the previous night, hardly eight hours ago. At one point, I almost told him that I loved him but then I had felt embarrassed and had stopped myself. How I wished to turn back the clock.

Suddenly, all the times my father had ever scolded me or argued with me, made sense. His reasons for protecting me, for making my decisions, for being upset with me finally dawned on me in one instance. I had finally realized the value of having a father now that he was no longer there! How I longed to hear his voice again, to experience that love of being scolded by him again. Now I would have no-one to call "Daddy".

After my father's soul had departed to be with his Lord, I realized that I had no other way to communicate my love for him, except through namaaz, and Surah-e-Yaseen. What sweet irony that only a month earlier I had joined Quran classes to perfect my recitation of Surah-e-Yaseen. Little did I know that it would be of use so very quickly in my life. It filled me with peace to know that I was honouring my father in the best way possible, that I was probably making him so proud of me because I could recite that Surah so confidently. When my Quran teacher came to pay her condolences, I kissed her hands and thanked her for giving me the most valuable gift anyone had ever given to me.

I had once heard in a majlis that when we send prayers and Sur-a-Yaseen to our departed parents, it is as if we are sending currency that they can redeem in heaven. It is almost like sending money to someone in another country where the recipient can convert it into usable currency. Telling our parents that we love them will not help them once they have passed away; afterwards, only prayers can communicate that message to them.

Every time I recited 2 rakat namaaz for my father, or recited Sur-a-Yaseen for him, I imagined an angel coming to him with the news that he had been sent yet another precious gift by his children on earth. I saw my father's happiness and pride as he sat amongst his friends and relatives.

That vision gave me so much peace. I found myself pleading to all who had come to comfort us to go home and hug their parents. I pleaded with young friends to learn how to recite Surah-e-Yaseen flawlessly, even if it was the only part of the Quran they ever learned to read well.

Surrounded by so many people - some we had never even seen before, we felt as if our parents were with us. I realized then, the importance of attending a burial and visiting the home of any bereaved family. Every embrace, every pat on the shoulder, even an awkward word of condolence has priceless value when you feel as if your world has shattered into a thousand pieces. When you lose a loved one, the emptiness of the house intensifies the pain.

Our parents are our protective shield from all the troubles of the world. You never realize that until they are gone. Any unkindness you experience brings to your heart - unbidden, the words, "if my father was alive, no-one would treat me like that!" Parents do so much for us that it is only fair that we prepare ourselves to pay them back - at least for their afterlife. I hope that every young and old person who reads my story will resolve to make amends with their parents, and tell them that they appreciate and love them. Father's Day, or Mother's Day occurs only once a year - we have 364 other days to show our love, and ask for forgiveness.

Amazingly, I feel even closer to my father now. I can now talk to him anytime in my heart, unrestricted by the constraints of time, language, and space. I tell him that his daughter remembers his guidance, and all the good times. She remembers all those special gifts he bought for her so indulgently, and she remembers how he did all that he could in order to empower her to be a thinker, and a leader. A daugh-

ter can never forget her father's love...a daughter remembers!

## SELECTED PRAYERS FOR PARENTS:

### NAMAZ-E-WALIDAYN (Prayers for Deceased Parents)

1. Make niyyat, for 2 rakat for "Namaz-e-Hadiya Waaledain, Qurbatan Ilallah".
2. In the 1st rakat after the recitation of Surah Al-Fateha, recite, as in qunoot, 10 times: "Rabbaghfirlee wa li waaledayya wa li mo'mineena yauma yaqumul hisab."

(Our Lord! Cover us with Thy forgiveness, myself, my parents and all believers on the day that the reckoning will be established.)

2. In the 2nd rakat, after Surah-Al-Fateha, recite, as in qunoot, 10 times: "Rabbighfirlee wa li waaledayya wa liman dakhala baiteeya mo'minan wa li mo'mineena wal mo'minaat."

(Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and those who enter my house with belief and men who believe and women who believe.)

After namaaz, recite 10 times in sajdah:

"Rabbir ham huma kama rabba-yaanee sagheera." (Lord, be merciful to them for they have brought me up in childhood.)

## SUPPLICATION

Consult *Sahifa al-Kamilah*, supplication #24. Available on: <<http://www.al-islam.org/sahifa/dua24.html>>.

## From Supplication #24:

O God,  
lower before them my voice  
make agreeable to them my words,  
make mild before them my temper,  
make tender toward them my heart,  
and turn me into their kind companion,  
their loving friend!

Imam Zinaul Abedin (as)  
Sahifa al-Kamilah, Supplication 24