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*My Kind,
Cruel Mother*

Every cook, from a celebrity chef to a humble homemaker, relies on a few essential ingredients. Safely nestled within their 'masala dabba' (spice box) are powders and pods which though small in quantity, are potent in taste. It is on the foundation of these vital ingredients that the cook exercises her culinary skill, preparing dishes that have the potential to either tantalize the taste buds or poison the palate.

Every cook worth her salt knows that some ingredients are absolutely necessary in most dishes, yet always cause tears (like chopped onions). Certain ingredients are the backbone of every recipe, yet may lead to a rise in blood pressure (like salt). Other ingredients assist the food to cook, yet cause heartburn when used in excess (like oil). Many ingredients give the food an incredible 'zing', but if added with a heavy hand, render the food almost inedible (like chilies).

Often, the difference between an ordinary dish and the masterpiece of a maestro is as simple as ensuring that every ingredient is added in the correct quantity and at the correct time. Also, the cook has to remain vigilant, continuously monitoring the progress of the dish, as turning a blind eye for just a moment can result in the pot

boiling over, leaving the stove an absolute mess. Finally, when all these steps are taken and all the dangers safely navigated, the final product is not a mere dish – it's a work of art that satisfies on every level – taste, nutrition and appearance.

Interestingly enough, a child is exactly like a dish while the parents are the chefs. The parents have to instill the correct qualities and values (ingredients) within the child, while ensuring that the child is exposed to stimuli that are not only appropriate but are also in the correct proportions and at the ideal times. Certain ingredients are necessary for the child, but are harmful in excess. Different parents follow different recipes, while some parents don't follow any recipe at all, simply hoping for the best!

In an age where fusion cuisine was all the rage, my mother's recipe for raising her children was unique for being old-fashioned and traditional. The food elsewhere may have been gourmet or artisanal, but even if it managed to do more than just look good and lack taste, there comes a point when a person craves 'home food'. Be it biryani, or just plain old chicken with roti, there's something in home food that satisfies and satiates like no other food can. When it came to my

upbringing, this is the recipe that my mother used – the falisafic, tried-and-tested Islamic recipe for a 'home girl'.

I write this many years later, in retrospect and appreciation of my mother's efforts. As a young girl, there were the occasional moments when I resented my mother's approach to upbringing as it felt like a prison cell with me the convict behind bars. Today, I realize that due to my own shortsightedness and ignorance, I had failed to comprehend her wisdom and understanding. Now, as a mother myself, trying to raise my own children in an environment which is increasingly dangerous by the day, I fully understand the wisdom in my mother's approach and really wish that every child could have been fortunate enough to have received the upbringing that I 'enjoyed'.

As a small child, I would often 'read' salah with my mother (to be honest, I seldom read more than one rakaat and my qiblah continuously changed!). However, when I turned seven, my mother sat me down and stressed the importance of salah to me. She then began to make me read all my salah on time – including fajr. Be it summer or winter, a holiday or a school day – there was absolutely no difference as every day was a salah day

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