

Topic: Filial Piety

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My Father's Son

Ever since I could stand, my older sister Humira has always been a pillar of strength for me to lean on. Whereas I am easily swayed by my emotions, her defining qualities are emotional fortitude and strength. So when I got a call from her on March 30th at midnight and heard her crying through the cracks in her voice, I knew something was wrong.

“Farhan, I’m scared.” Instead of the usual strength and assurance, this time fear and uncertainty coursed through my sister’s voice. “Baba just had a stroke. We’re at the hospital right now.”

My phone almost slipped out of my hands as I wondered if my mind was playing a cruel trick on me and if I was actually asleep buried underneath my notes on conditional proofs, Boolean logic, and discrete mathematical structures.

“Farhan. Farhan! Say something! Where are you?” My sister’s voice broke me out of my trance and made me realize that although I was very much sleep deprived, I was still awake and everything was very real.

“Farhan, where are you?! Why aren’t you home?” I managed to explain how I was still at the City College of NY and had planned on sleeping over at a friend’s apartment to avoid the long 1.5-hour commute before my midterm the next day.

“Can you come to Jamaica Hospital right now?” But before I could say yes, a message popped up on my laptop. My friend asked if I had solved one of the questions on the practice midterm and suddenly I realized I hadn’t even looked at them. My grip tightened on my phone as I stared blankly at the computer screen.

Shit, what do I do? On one hand, I still had another two chapters to review and an entire practice midterm to go through. But on the other hand, my mom was in Bangladesh, and my

other sister was in deep Brooklyn taking care of her newborn. This meant Humira was all alone in the ER. And so I called a \$60 Uber from Harlem to Jamaica Hospital at 12:05 AM and decided I could worry about my midterm tomorrow. I fell into a deep sleep during that long car ride, hoping my mind was actually playing a cruel trick on me, and that I would actually wake up at my desk.

I felt each step from my Uber to the ER in my heart. Each foot I got closer physically manifested as a pang that began in my chest and jolted across every nerve in my body. And once I finally saw my dad's comatose body lying on top of the ER bed, that pang transformed into a wave that consumed me. Tears surged from my eyes and I buried my face in my sister's shoulder.

So many times we get lost in the things that we are doing that we forget the reasons behind our convictions. When I saw my dad unconscious, the first thing I felt was anger, but only at myself. I was angry that I had the audacity of even thinking I would be *wasting* time by coming to the hospital.

It has been six months since my dad's accident. Since then, he's been transferred from the Intensive Care Unit at Jamaica Hospital to Windsor Park Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, until last month when he was finally allowed to return home. My dad had a hemorrhagic stroke, which is when a blood vessel in the brain ruptures. Since it was on the right side of his brain, he has been affected by paralysis on the left side of his body, memory loss, and vision problems.¹

Through all the chaos of my dad's stroke, the one good thing that has come out of it is the strengthened bond between everyone in my family. Michael J. Fox once said, "Family is not an

¹ *Hemorrhagic Strokes* by The American Heart Association retrieved from http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/AboutStroke/TypesofStroke/HemorrhagicBleeds/Hemorrhagic-Strokes-Bleeds_UCM_310940_Article.jsp

important thing. It's everything."² The past six months have shown me the weight these words hold in my life. My motivation has always been my family. My parents immigrated from Bangladesh almost two decades ago, leaving behind their own families, friends, and ways of life. And it was all to give their future children (i.e. me) the opportunity to live lives better than theirs. America is the coveted land of possibilities where immigrants arrive with a willingness to toil long hours and with dreams of a better future.

While my dad began working lonely 12-hour shifts in his taxicab, my mom was at home with a job that also never seemed to end: cooking, cleaning, and taking care of me and my two older sisters. Our family has gotten by on my dad's income, and considering the median average for a taxi driver in May 2016 was \$24,300, our family of five lived very modest lives.³

Nevertheless, I still marvel at the generosity and hospitality that my parents practiced in all aspects of their life. If my sister Humira suddenly fell sick and wanted her favorite Thai soup from Nanking in Jackson Heights, my dad wouldn't hesitate to drive the extra half-hour there after a long day of work. Then my parents would eat what they ate every night: rice with whatever curry that my mom had prepared. This was just so my sisters and I could eat as much soup as possible.

Growing up in this type of environment has a tremendous impact on my values and my outlook on life. The thing I cherish the most is my family and particularly my parents. The unconditional love and support they've shown can never be fully repaid. So whatever small sacrifices I can make, I do them in earnest. That's why I currently attend CUNY City College of New York as a Macaulay Honors Scholar, instead of Cornell University's College of Arts and

² *Family Quotes* by BrainyQuote retrieved from <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/michaeljf189302.html>

³ *Taxi Drivers, Ride-Hailing Drivers, and Chauffeurs* from Bureau of Labor Statistics retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/transportation-and-material-moving/taxi-drivers-and-chauffeurs.htm#tab-5>

Science. So many of my friends have called me crazy for declining Cornell's offer this past July for a fall 2017 transfer. With a top 10-ranking for "Best Undergraduate Engineering Programs," extensive alumni network, on-campus life and brand name, who wouldn't choose that over a CUNY?⁴

However, with all those benefits comes the drawbacks of living at a college more than 4 hours away, burdening my parents with extensive college loans, and leaving them with an empty house. As the youngest child and also the only son in my family, I have long known that I will be the one to look after my parents in their old age. It is a role that I have come to accept and even embrace.

But, there have been times where I have struggled with my responsibilities towards my parents and my own hyperactive lifestyle and desire to reach my potential and fulfill my dreams. Western culture seems to embrace individuality and the notion of birds leaving their nest, whereas Eastern culture emphasizes the importance of filial piety and obligation to our parents.⁵

Although growing up, I actually struggled with this balance of responsibilities, and even lamented my lack of choice, but ever since my father's stroke I've come to understand just how much he has done for me. Every Friday, when I help him get ready and wheelchair him to our local mosque for Friday prayer, I can only imagine how he would do the same when I couldn't walk as a baby. Now I'm the man of the house. My scholarship money goes towards helping pay the bills. Also, I'm the one calling before coming home every night in case my family wants or needs me to pick something up, just like how my dad would do the same before.

⁴ *Best Undergraduate Engineering Programs* from USNews retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/engineering-doctorate>

⁵ *The Dilemma of Looking after Aging Desi Parents* (2016) from Lassi With Lavina retrieved from <http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/thebuzz/the-dilemma-of-looking-after-aging-desi-parents/html>

Given all that my parents have done for me, I can't ever imagine leaving them for something as simple as college. I've been taught that education is one of the most important things to success, but none of that is worth more than family. I am grateful for all the sacrifices that my parents have made up until this point in my life, and all the sacrifices they will continue to make whether I ask for that or not. There have been countless times I have taken advantage of my dad's generous nature, and now in his time of need, I strive to be by his side as he has always been by mine.

This is why I think it is important to practice Li. These values of respect, loyalty, and filial piety are the values that my parents have embedded into my personality since the moment I was born and these are the values I want to pass on to my own children someday.