

OF FOOD, FAMILY AND A FEW TIMELY WORDS

Misbah Rasheed

Rafia is my student. She is quiet and fragile-looking. She is one of those intelligent students who don't pay much heed to their studies. I often tried to find out the reason for her meekness. Even in class she had a lost look in her eye. She was reluctant to let me in on her worries.

One day things got worse when her friends told me she hadn't been eating for the last several days and was refusing to tell anyone the reason for her desire to waste herself away like this. I was extremely disturbed by this young adolescent's complete despair and her desire to end her own life. I tried to convince her to unburden her anxieties with me. I spoke with her at length after class, away from the intrusive gaze of her class-fellows. After a lot of effort Rafia finally agreed to talk.

Rafia's parents had chosen an illiterate boy to be her husband and wanted to marry her off at this young age. There was a lot of pressure on her to agree. Her family was constantly taunting her about her studies, saying that she wouldn't be able to make anything of her life with all this education.

After an hour of counseling Rafia understood that a hunger strike or ending one's life was not the solution to her problem; that in fact education teaches us to face our problems with courage. On the other hand, I called her mother and spoke with her about the issue. 'All this pressure will cost Rafia her self-confidence,' I told her mother, 'And she won't be able to realize her potential nor nurture her talents if you marry her off now and tie her to household responsibilities for the rest of her life. Let her study and make a name for herself and for you.' The mother saw the sense in what I was saying.

The power of truth made her change her mind and convince the other family members to let Rafia study for now.

After that day I saw a huge transformation in that child. She was now more attentive to her studies. Her grades this term were better than they were last term.

One small bit of my timely attention made such a huge difference to one human life, the life of my student.