

Theatre of Debate- Tie your camel up

ASIF

I was trying to unscramble all the extra rows that Lesley had 'helpfully' added to my Excel table, when I heard the landline ring. I knew it was mum. Again.

I keep my mobile on silent, but she knows I'm home. With remote working, more documents are 'shared access' and my formulas weren't working. We joke at work that you have speak '**Leslish**' to sort her interventions out. Mum would have to wait.

I felt bad. With losing dad to covid a few months ago, and my younger brother Saif nearly going the same way, she was struggling. The global family Whatsapp group was a solace when we had dad's funeral, where only 10 of us could go. Everyone had multiplied prayers for dad, but the messages that are flying around now are multiplying mum's grief instead!

Mum's brother, My Mamu Koki is the worst culprit. He started sharing fake news about Covid 19- that '**It's all a Govt hoax**'; that it's linked to 5G cos it '**can't be coincidence that the masts went up when covid started**'; how big pharmas were behind it and how Trump invented 'Kung flu' and sent it to Wuhan to stop China becoming a super power!

I butted in with '**I suppose they wrote 'RETURN TO SENDER' on the package and sent it back to him?**'

I'd never been disrespectful to my Mamu before.

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Mum was in tears, so I told her, I said look 'mute notifications' and 'clear chat' or leave the group, but she didn't want to miss out on family gossip and comparing shami kebab recipes.

Mamu had gone too far. He said the reason Saif hadn't recovered fully was because '**they**' had put him in an induced coma to inject him with experimental drugs that were unsafe. He told mum not to take her flu jab because,

'the medics are gonna inject you with corona without you knowing. They need guinea pigs'

Mamu's older than mum, so she listened. Saif found out and went mental at Mamu, and now mum's after us for insulting her brother!

I tried to reason with her.

'Saif went into hospital on a ventilator and came out a research hero, by participating in the Recovery trial. Post that on the family group'

She said **'My son used to climb Mount Snowdon and now he can't climb the stairs without running out of breath'**

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After dad, I had asked mum to move in with us. Be in 'our bubble' rather than at home surrounded with memories of dad. Not that any of us want to forget. Mum preferred to stay put.

With the boys back at school our bubble burst soon enough. One of the kids in the younger one, Zain's, class developed symptoms so the whole year was sent home to isolate. Zain was asymptomatic alhamdulillah, so we couldn't get him tested. Poor lad, he's stuck in his room on his tablet, with everyone keeping our distance.

Mum wanted to come over and fuss over him but without her flu jab, I'm not taking any risks, not even in the garden.

The wife was saying she misses the full lockdown. With everyone not leaving the house, at least you knew they were safe.

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That evening, I popped my head through Zain's door, he was on facetime with mum. Crying.

'What's the point of school-work Dado, when we can't beat coronavirus?'

Dad's loss had hit my kids hard and now they couldn't see or hug their grandmother.

Then I heard her- telling Zain the story, the one she always told us. About the camel.

Earlier, I had been to the interfaith focus group at the mosque. They're rolling out a vaccine trial in our area and need hundreds of volunteers. The cohort that have signed up is 93% white and our communities are not convinced. The people from the task force patiently answered all their concerns. That the vaccine is not 'live'; that this particular one has no animal products and is completely 'halal'; **'No, it won't affect your insurance'**; that even though there's a 'race' to find one that works for everyone, there's no corners cut with the protocols. We took in all the information. Dad would have known what to advise others, but now they're all looking to me to lead the way.

Seeing my boy upset, it became clear to me.

The gov't keeps saying that the cavalry is coming but the equation's only gonna change when we have a vaccine for everyone. Till then we're on this corona coaster or 'new normal' as they keep calling it.

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The next day I told mum I was volunteering. I put my name down on the National vaccine registry.

'What about the man who was on that trial and got really ill?'

'I'm doing it for you mum. Because people did trials, you can now be protected with your flu jab, and you're not even taking that. We've lost dad, we don't want to lose you'

Then I quoted her the same story she told Zain.

One day our Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, was travelling with a Bedouin companion and he noticed that the Bedouin didn't tie up his camel when they stopped at their destination. The Prophet asks him why he didn't tie up the camel. **'I trust in Allah that he won't run away or be stolen'**, replied the companion. And our Prophet replied, **'Tie your camel up first, then trust in Allah'**.

See, faith doesn't mean you bow down to fate and don't play your part. Knowledge is the future.

I took a selfie when I got my first dose of the vaccine, and mum posted it on the group. There was a flurry of messages from the anti-vaccers, and mum replied reminding them of our prophet's message.

'Tie your camel up first, then trust in Allah'.

The chat went quiet and a couple of cousins direct messaged me to find out what they could do.

We're riding this second wave together as a family. Mum had her flu jab and we're meeting again. Safely. Inshallah she can come to us for Christmas. Her halal turkey is legendary.