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# The Grass is Always Greener

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I could never envision that the grass could be so greener on the other side until we moved back to Sydney. While I am in Sydney, I long for the overflowing sidewalks and jammed Dhaka streets, steamy load shedding, adulterated savories, the dear friends and familiar surroundings that I lovingly call my own. Throughout the year I look forward to the day I get on a plane to head home. Once the euphoria of being at home wears off, the eerily still neighborhood of Sydney, it's made up niceties and robotic smiles, arrogant weeds and over-zealous lawn grass and most of all the hyperactive grandsons start waving their welcoming hands. As soon as we are once more in Sydney, I start looking forward to the day of return to Dhaka. It is a classic case of putting one foot in one boat and the other in another.

It has now been more than five years that we have been living in Sydney. We came back to live here after about 35 years. We first came to Australia in 1977 and then returned home to Bangladesh after 3 years. We lived in Bangladesh but used to visit Australia often. What we did not contemplate was ever living here again. I suppose one can't always be sure of what the future holds. However, I have always believed that just as our decision to return to Bangladesh 35 years ago was the best decision for that time, the decision to return to Australia has also been one of our well-timed decisions. I think we have had the best of both worlds.

I am often asked how I feel about being here after such a long gap. I have no complaints but have mixed feelings. I am glad to be here, so close to my children and grandchildren. I am not so happy to have given up my own surroundings back home. I had one kind of life back in Dhaka and live another kind here. It is not so easy to weigh one against the other.

Most men back in Bangladesh have two lives – one inside the house and another outside. Like most, I was in control of my life inside my own home. I could choose and control my living style and preferences without any interference. I could enjoy the privileges available to some of living in a third world country.

Here, however, circumstances limit my ability to make similar lifestyle choices inside my own house.

In the public domain in Bangladesh, very few can claim any reasonable control over his or her own life preferences. There is no certainty; exception to the rule is the rule. Those who are able to master this exception prosper materially. In contrast, our life here outside of the home has that certainty. It has some set rules of engagement within which one is able to have preferences. Over here, I know what I can expect under certain circumstances as opposed to being in the dark about what is ahead.

Looking back, I feel that the intricacies of home life in Bangladesh take my preference. When it comes to the life outside of the home, the pendulum swings the other way – I like it here.

There are also two facets of social life for most men in Bangladesh. One involves family and family friends. The other revolves around personal friends, acquaintances, associates and work. I have the social life here that includes the family. The other kind of social circle that rotates around friends, acquaintances and work does not exist for me here. It is fairly difficult for someone like me to establish this kind of social circle when I haven't lived here in my younger days or during my work life.

I have noticed that women do not seem to have much difficulty establishing a connection with each other of similar age and interest. They can get on the phone and talk to one another for an hour or so without much difficulty. This is not so easy for men and it seems to me that this may lead some to suffer isolation and depravation culminating in depression or dementia.

The constant search for greener pastures on the other side of the fence has often led me to think: where am I 'living' at any given moment of time. Is it at the present, future or past? Not in the present, for sure. If I did, I would have discovered the greener grass on my side of the fence. Most of the time I am living in the past reminiscing how good or bad it had been or in the future dreaming how great it could be. As a consequence I am missing out on the 'present'. But the reality is that at any moment in time, present is what is real, where life is happening. The

past and the future at any time are only illusions. They are non-existent at the present moment.

But most of us spend our lifetime living either in the past or in the future, while the present slips by. When at work, we dream about being on vacation; on vacation, we worry about the work piling up on our desks. We spend all our resources buying a car or a house we like. And then think about how much I would enjoy driving a better car or living in a bigger house. In the process we miss out on enjoying and appreciating what we have at the present moment.

Would that mean that we shouldn't be learning from the past or plan for the future? Indeed we must, but not 'live' in those. When we talk or think of our glorious Islamic past, we live in it and not learn from it. When we talk about our rosy future, we fantasize living in it, not planning for it. People have wondered: "Without hating my present circumstances, how would I have any motivation to get things done?" But one can be mindful of the present and be motivated. A dancer or artist is motivated not by dissatisfaction but by the joy of his or her work of the present. Some of the most important changes in the world were accomplished by wise people motivated by the compassion and passion inherent in living in the present moment.

If I learnt to live in the moment or present, I would have enjoyed my life much more both here in Sydney and as well as in Dhaka. But the thought of future happiness, which is only an illusion at the present, stands in the way of my present happiness. And in the process I have been missing out what is real in Sydney as well as in Dhaka.

**“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, but to live in the **present** moment wisely and earnestly.” –**

**Gautama Buddha.**