

It doesn't matter if I sleep at 4 A.M. My alarm will still go off every morning at 7:00 A.M. It's said a man's work is from sun to sun but a mother's work is never done. Once I get out of my bed, I'm back on the merry go round of life that just keeps going faster and faster and it's impossible to slow it down or jump off.

Well, here's an illustration of just another day in my life. As usual, I readied my kids for school, chattered with them about the heroic abilities of the power puff girls and Pikachu hurriedly over bowls of cereal, skimmed over the papers, gave my staff orders for the day, did one and half hours of tai chi and kick boxing, rushed off to shower, checked my e-mail and it was already midday. My 4 year old son, Omar, came bouncing in back from school and started champing for a game of snakes and ladders!!

"NO WAY, Omar!!" I fretted, "I have articles to submit before midnight, a lot of research and preparation for my TV pilot show to be shot tomorrow, home chores, and groceries to shop for...." And then my heart broke as his startled little face crumpled with disappointment and his guiltless eyes swelled up with tears.

All of a sudden I was the star performer in the melodrama of multitasking: eating, feeding him, playing the seemingly never ending game, chatting with a heart broken friend, fixing up make-up artist for the next day, going through the script, stroking my attention seeking Lhasa Apso, instructing the carpenters where to put nails in for photographs to be hung on the wall, and wrapping up a present all at ONE TIME and wishing (as I'm sure all women do) that I had ten arms like the Goddess Durga and could be just as invincible. My mom was a working, single mother too, but I don't remember her life being so frenetic. She too had the same extraordinary pressure from multitasking in multiple roles from domestic goddess, memsaab, gung-ho mom, social bee, a passion driven dance career to kitchen queen. But I remember song filled drives up into the mountain, standing on the bonnet of the car and swinging excitedly on banyan tree vines with laughter filled renditions of the Tarzan jungle call on the highway, learning to write alphabets on sandy beaches, long camping weekends, relishing her hand cooked "rassa waala aaloo's, and playing multiple uninterrupted games of carom.

I think some of the problem today, lies in multitasking being elevated to a quality to aspire for mainly due to the fact that given greater opportunities, higher performance expectations are all demanded in an instant.

Sure we all want to be successful, rich, and famous but why just professionally? After much deliberation I have realised that a life which is merely professionally successful at any cost is a lifelong curse. Because work pressures which will never cease and ambition seasoned with the eternal human desire for more, have no boundaries.

This therefore, brings me back to the whirlwind of my multitasking performances. I have to constantly and consciously remind myself that life is a rainbow of experiences and the choice to make it a distorted, colourless, fragmented one, v/s a bright, vivid,

happy and breathtaking one lies with me. All obstacles are barriers that can be broken with a positive approach and I've broken single parenting down to a very cheerful 7 step program.

- 1) Affirm daily that my kids, work, family, friends and ME, all matter!!
- 2) The quest is in achieving a balance
- 3) The trick lies in prioritizing.
- 4) I'm human and can only do as much as I can possibly do.
- 5) Always ensure the kids have a healthy relationship with their father. It's the best thing for their emotional well being and it allows me the flexibility and freedom to send them over to him anytime I need periods of guilt-free time.
- 6) Its all right if the kids are home with only the nanny at times. They're old enough to entertain themselves, besides, she's responsible and being paid well for it. Let her do her job.
- 7) stay single. It's hard enough playing so many roles without the added pressure of being a full time wife too!!

For me, my kids take precedence, and I take my multidimensional parental role of provider, counsellor, adviser, disciplinarian, and nurturer very seriously. I focus on premium bonding time with them whether it's oodles of hugging and kissing, cuddling up and watching cartoons and children's movies together, or swimming and bowling with them at the club whenever possible. I make sure they're well fed, happy and healthy, plunged into various play and educational activities, do their homework and are growing up to be respectful, loving, kind people and good citizens. As a mother, my instinct is to protect them from all the horror in the world but there is a clear line between mothering and smothering. I can prevent them from being exposed to sex and violence on TV, but sometimes feel so helpless about real life censorship. I remember their fright and tears when we were driving past a masochistic sword and chain wielding, back slashing, blood oozing religious group on Moharram and also their shock and embarrassment looking at the stark naked Naga baba's at the Kumbh Mela. How does I logically or emotionally accept that I should make viewing semi nudity on TV off limits as also all the blood and violence in a Terminator till such time that they turn 16, but if it's religious it's perfectly acceptable and should be palatable at any age? I surmise it's not a parent's job to always protect their kids from life, but to prepare them for it. So while I'll ensure they are constantly chaperoned to ensure their physical safety, I'll also enrol them in karate class. I can't guarantee them not falling into a pool, but I can teach them how to swim. And I'm certain that by giving them my shoulder to cry on, my strength to lean on and hopefully by being an example to learn from, they'll emerge as strong, resilient and intelligent, good human beings.

The joy of parenting isn't only about rearing and teaching them. One learns so much from them too. I may seek the wisdom of the ages, but it's inspiring to view the world through the eyes of children. They infuse my life with a renewed sense of wonder, a desire to learn and explore, and are a constant reminder to stop contriving, let my hair down and

start living. There are phases when my work and social life gets hectic and I don't have large chunks of time for them, but I'll make it a point to take cathartic time out to frisk around and somersault on the bed with them, or just get a couple cans of snow spray so we can go up to the terrace and have a 5 minute blizzard fight! I sometimes wonder if the term "quality time" was invented by working parents to feel less guilty about their work lives.

Elaine Heffner once said, "Women do not have to sacrifice personhood if they are mothers. They do not have to sacrifice motherhood in order to be persons. Liberation was meant to expand women's opportunities, not to limit them. And the self-esteem that has been found in new pursuits can also be found in mothering".

I choose to feel good about having dreams, desires, needs and many mantles to don. Yeah sure, sometimes in the toss up between an Enrique Iglesias concert and the Vienna choir boys the surprise winner may be the silly but enjoyable Panchatantra for kids. But these little sacrifices mixed with their hysterical unbridled laughter at the absurd characters in the play are my passport to guilt free "me" time; time to read, party till odd hours, work till odder hours, time for personal growth, self care, friends and maybe even a significant other. As I concentrate on amalgamating my various roles, and doing justice to each one of them, I marvel at how my mother struck that balance. Despite occasional bouts of guilt at being a relatively absentee parent, (I never agreed with her on that one), she continued undeterred in her vociferous pursuit for a "complete" existence and was loved, appreciated, and respected for it.

Last night, I lay on my bed with Aalia enveloped in my right hand and Omar in my left one, their legs thrown across my stomach, while Taffy, my little Apso, tried to wrestle for a bit of my pillow space too. It was so astonishing that despite 3 pillows on the bed only mine had 4 heads on it. As I launched into a magical bedtime story, Omar kissed me gently and said, "Mama, you're awesome". Aalia giggled and said, "You mean Oswald. She's like an octopus with 8 arms." I shrieked and they dissolved into fits of laughter. Life couldn't be more perfect, it takes so little to be so happy.