

By Naveed Gilani

Driving out of my house on a Sunday morning I saw my reflection in the rear view mirror under the shining sun. My skin looked slightly wrinkled and saggy around the jawbone but I told myself that it was just my imagination.

Months go by. On another Sunday, sitting on the front steps of my home, as I was putting on my shoes, getting ready for the weekly basketball game with my three sons when Danny, my youngest one said: "hey, Baba do you know that you have a bald spot on your head". As he stood behind me, he probably had a very clear view of my head. I realized that I had grown old. The realization, that I had subconsciously tried very hard to avoid for quite some time, was out in the open. Soon the 'one' spot developed into 'many' spots and the 'view' became quite noticeable.

"I know, I know," was the only straight answer when my well-wisher keep telling me about my spots. The sad part was that most of the people concerned were of the opposite sex. And that was not happy news. For someone who has always been complemented on the head full of perfect hair, this was quite a put down. So now I realized that the first lesson taught in the barber school was to complement each and every customer on his hair, whether he is worthy of it or not, and you are sure to get a good tip.

We men have a thing about our hair. Coming baldness in the twenties is just plain genetically endowed. However at my

My bald spots

age, it is an entirely different matter. Believe it or not, discovering a malfunction with the mitral valve in the heart is not the same as falling hair — former being just plain bad *kismet* while latter is a challenge to our chauvinism. It is a ceremonial graduation from youth to old age making a short pit stop in middle age.

How does one know when this is coming! Noticing the bald

spot is the first. Then there is the denial phase which could last many years depending on the metabolism of the person confronted with the problem. With some balding men it shows in their wardrobe

when beige pants are replaced with bright yellow ones while others start making more frequent trips to the neighbourhood mosque. I, on the other hand, had my own ways of being reminded of the time.

I remember the times when as a young boy, we used to listen carefully to the war stories narrated by my dad. Whenever we had company over, he would tell those stories with some humorous anecdotes here and there that we would greatly enjoy. Often after dinner we would ask my father for a story or a joke.

"Tell us about the time when you were travelling by train from Bombay to Deradun with your friends," we would say, "or tell us when you went to Kabul with the college hockey team."

Well guess what, now it is my time to be requested for interesting stories... and I also tell my own stories over and over

kind of comment that would get us in deep trouble from our dear wives.

The body has a way of telling us too. I look in the mirror at myself and find areas of my body that shows signs of sags and floppy skin. All my adult life, I have had a regimented exercise routine that has helped me keep my weight constant for the last twenty years. But the pant size is something that no exercise routine can do anything about. The mid-section has increased in size. By how much, I won't say. I keep asking my wife questions like, "Does it show"? Poor thing keeps reassuring me, "No, it doesn't, maybe just a little but nobody will be paying attention". I, like a little child, believe her because I want to.

Now, I read books and enjoy them a lot. I also enjoy my boys growing into young men and the many many gifts that God has so graciously bestowed upon me; the balmy breeze of the mornings and evenings of Karachi. I have also learnt to enjoy each and every moment that I spend with my brothers and sisters, at work, at home, or with friends and also the mellowness in character that comes with the bald spots.

I have also learnt to thank God for all the things that I have been blessed with. I have also learnt to discover all the principles that I stand for; I have the strength to hold on to those principles — to follow Socrates' advice; "know thyself". I have also learned to understand people's feelings and how to be mindful of them.

In a nutshell, I have learned to appreciate life, with or without bald spots because we live only once. ■



again.

The only difference is my dad never had a bald spot which had always given me a it-can-never-happen-to-me feeling.

Finding older women attractive is another indicator. One day my brother and I were watching a sitcom. It was about a middle-aged lady with a beautiful young daughter. The mother was not bad looking, I commented, to which my brother also agreed. It dawned on me then that we had officially set foot in the middle age. Here we were, appreciating an older woman who, a few years ago, would not have earned even a casual comment from me. You know, the