



Life In A Smile

When was the last time you looked a stranger in the eye and said hello? If you pay attention, you will notice many look down or look away before they would consider lending a nod or a smile. Observing this simple gesture has been a project of mine for the longest time. Saying hello to a stranger lends to such a powerful and liberating connection. There is a great deal of personal space shared between two people as they pass each other in a hallway, on a street, or in a store yet I have witnessed such a great distance between the same two people as their paths cross. I have often wondered if it is a lack of self-esteem, invasion of privacy, or the inability to connect that prevents some from looking up and connecting with another as they pass by.

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There is something to be said for the postures we take when we greet people. In business, the evaluation lies in the handshake, during the interview we note body language. When passing a person, hello should be the friendly acknowledgement. A humble gesture towards another is a gift of common courtesy. Even a nod of the head would offer recognition of the person in your presence.

Society craves the common nod, the moment where two people exchange a simple gesture that lends to a nicety. Common curiosity doesn't have to be a thing of the past. We have so many different venues that keep us locked in our own worlds that we forget what it's like to open ourselves up to real people. Communication through email, Facebook, text messages and Twitter all leave us behind the curtain. We are so disconnected from our reality that our worlds become compartmentalized amongst groups of people. Individually, it seems we can only connect to those we know or have to do business with. Isolated through one-dimensional technology, we draw to us drama through our individual quests that stem from our craving for the fullness and unpredictability of human interaction and experience. Once we come upon another face we are lost in the interaction. The blankness of another as they pass can be disconcerting, and appear aloof. Why are we programming ourselves in society to be taken aback by another?

Our formality and general politeness has fallen by the wayside. I was recently in the hospital for a major surgery. For three days, it seemed I was sent there as a sounding board for some of the early morning or late night staff. Without fail, those in for those shifts would vent their problems. At first I was a little surprised by the constant chatter. Someone else may have been upset because their focus should be on the patient sent there

to heal. I, however, viewed it as a sign that people no longer have the skill set to appropriately interact. Given a moment and an audience, some feel free to just blurt out their day (or “air their dirty laundry” as my grandmother would say). Many choose the strangest places and situations to do so. Is it just the captive audience or are we really so people deprived? Technology lends to the illusion that we, as a society, are quite advanced. Yet individuals’ interactions with one another could be viewed as the opposite. We seem as a whole to be disengaged along with being generally unaware of others around us. These actions could easily be viewed as outright disregard for our fellow humans. Yet I have a tendency to believe we are simply lacking in human common sense and grace.

I can only imagine that our great-grandparents would think us arrogant or in some cases quite ignorant regarding our behavior. Growing up, many of us were taught the actions of kindness and respect meant interacting and participating with others. People took pride in the way they dressed, ate three square meals a day and made it a point to say hello to their neighbor. Our surroundings were not as sophisticated yet our ways of interacting with each other held a much deeper level of sophistication than they do today. Becoming more advanced as a society shouldn’t mean becoming more withdrawn towards humankind. It’s easier for others to close out those around them because they are not as well-versed in the interactions of another, unless those around them are familiar. The challenge is to look into to the unfamiliar face and connect. This seems to be a struggle for more than half of our society.

It is our human nature to want to be accepted and connected to the world around us. The awareness of one another helps us develop our people skills and allows us to better understand ourselves. Ignoring another would have been offensive to the Gods as they understood that we are here to coexist, interact and exchange pleasantries as humans with one another. It is our duty to interact with each other. Refusing to pay attention to another is inexcusable - we cannot close ourselves down to such a common courtesy of acknowledgement.

My most enjoyable experiences nowadays are when I pass a younger person and they look towards me as the stranger who is greeting them with a “hello”. There is such a feeling of renewed hope when they respond back. Our children have been taught to fear the stranger and I was brought up to be kind to the stranger. Truly two different worlds co-existing within the same society. Yet I still hold hope that not all has, nor will be, lost. To begin the process of opening up your world, next time you pass another lend them a moment of human courtesy. Come out of your day-to-day, look up, and connect with another human being. As you open the connection with a friendly gesture, somewhere on this planet that simple moment will brighten an area of this world where there may have been a small cloud of darkness. It is with every act of kindness that we create a world of change. Don’t be surprised if once you start opening yourself to others that your whole essence begins to feel lighter. Taking care to notice another and acknowledge the presence of someone passing by opens you up to infinite possibilities.

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