

Let's Think Together

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Engaging with Strangers

Most of us lead very busy, highly scheduled, disciplined lives. To be successful today we need to be so. The day's timings are charted out from the moment we wake up, till we crash into bed. Any disturbances or hiccups to this routine throws us into a panic, puts us in an irritable mood and raises our stress levels. Because we have programmed ourselves to be so effective, we are unable to embrace unexpectedness.

Sometime ago, while driving up by the hills around Vellore, I came to a tiny village. My driver and I parked the car and just enjoyed the view, the air and the beauty of it. Within moments, a woman came by and started talking to me. Who was I, why was I there etc. We got talking and she insisted that I visit her home. The thatched hut, was cool. The intricate kolam outside and cow dung plastered floor were welcoming. Within minutes, she sent her son to get me a "colour" soda. We talked about children, the rising prices, the lack of bus services to this village and many issues that affect women. More women joined us. It was wonderful how this family and small village had embraced me into their circle. The mother sent a boy to bring some gram flour and made hot banana bajjis – another treat. This was the way to live! Allowing others to come into your life unexpectedly, savouring the richness of new friendship, and leaving each other with wonderful memories.

When I reached home, I saw a car parked outside my house and my heart sank. A friend had arrived unexpectedly. For a moment I was irritated as I thought of what little I had to cook a nice dinner. Then I was jolted back to the joyfulness I felt when I intruded into someone else's life just a few hours ago. I remembered the gracious welcome, the lazy chatter and felt ashamed.

The challenge for me was not to be irritable and time conscious, but to pass on the experience I had just been given. As she had traveled a long distance, I put a comfortable chair for her in the kitchen. We talked as I cooked. Then I put out my fine china and we ate our meal "in style" as she called it. The next morning we had our coffee and caught up with news and views. I could see from her face, that the tensions with which she came had disappeared. Her face seemed soft and pretty, not just from her make up, but I suspect from the joy of being loved despite her sudden visit.

Most of us think that in our busy schedules there is no space for unexpected times like this. But experience has shown me that we were made to interact with each other. To eat together, to share laughter, to make good memories with each other, to jolt each other with love and happiness at unexpected moments. When we live this way, we learn many new things.like how precious people really are; how large the ordinary person's heart is, how he or she can truly care for another, despite all that divides us.

Think about this!

When was the last time you made a friend of a stranger? When was the last time a stranger made a friend of you?

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