

Charity

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And remember We took a covenant from the Children of Israel (to this effect): Worship none but Allah; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practise regular charity. Then did ye turn back, except a few among you, and ye backslide (even now). (Quran)

The concept of kindness is often an underrated value in our ever so changing world. We continue to rely on our handsets for guidance when it is our hearts that drive our lives. The idea of assisting others or fighting for something altruistically has faded behind the technology of our world.

The idea of charity was once a valued belief of our human society. But with the advance of our society from, what I consider, the human-connection phase to the technological phase of our existence we lost that physical connection that we once felt. Hell, we can “see” the whole world from a MacBook Pro during a whole day. There isn’t a need to feel each other, or truly understand each other.

For some of us physical, the emotional connection is what we long for the most. It can be through a touch or a colloquy that leads to familial bond unlike any technological advancement. No Facetime or Tango video call can lead us to this point that any person can feel. For me it was my freshmen year in high school that me toward the virtue of charity.

The death of my grandfather was a pivotal moment in my life that led to my epiphany that changed me. He was an old man with grey hair and dead kidneys. He

would daily describe his guilt. The death of my grandmother was through the ramifications that he created. His lifestyle was that of a philander.

To earn a living he was a taxi driver. During his various journeys between the various villages of Guyana he would meet various women of different religions and inevitably have affairs with them while he was married to my grandmother. There are supposedly some “Aunties” that I don’t know about in various countries that he fathered. His various affairs lead to his marriage with my grandmother to disintegrate, leaving six children with a single mother. She did what any women did during those times to support her children, and it wasn’t prostitution. She would end up with a man named “King”. In Guyana there is a tradition of giving people names and “call names”, aka nicknames, based on their physical or societal condition. If you were fat your call name would be “Fat Bai”. There are other “call names” such as “Forty Duff”, a description for one of my dad’s friends whom consumed forty pieces of a bread call Duff. It’s soft bread that usually comes in soup.

“King” was a typical Guyanese man of that era during the 1970s to 1980s, dominant and drunk most of the time. He would repeatedly try to sleep with my mother and her sisters while he was inebriated. My grandmother would have to offer him sex to keep him from molesting my mom and her sisters. My grandmother would die at the hands of her “husband”, “King” after being beaten into a coma. She would die in an ICU unit while her children waited for her in a waiting room, a waiting room that would be filled with their tears.

His resounding words of wisdom was, “You must always treat your parents good, bitter...and I regret what I did to your mother.” These words have echoed with my

conscience for almost ten years. They have one of the hallmarks of my life, to not live with regret. To not leave the hungry without food, to not leave the defenseless without hope.

As I iterated before, our society has forgotten or belittled the idea of altruism. The idea of charity to the poor is a forgotten virtue among our youth. For me it started with the simple giving of a pencil to a classmate, then the giving to the poor and the homeless. The homeless of the Jamaica Bus Terminal in Queens were often ignored by the masses. I went to Thomas Alva Edison Vocational & Technical High School in Jamaica, Queens and would have to use the Q41 Bus to go home from the Jamaica Bus Terminal. Someone always has an excuse, "I need it for myself..." or "Fuck the bum!" I was like that for half of my freshmen year in 2004 before I found it extremely hard to walk away. Something clicked in me one day that I can't explain. This feeling of "I can't walk away. These people need me to help them." And so I did.

It became automatic for me to not care about myself, but to care about others. I would normally use my weekly allowance to feed any of the homeless people at the Jamaica Bus Terminal I would see. It separated me from the rest of my student body, as word spread back to school of my altruistic acts. It wasn't just around school that I demonstrated the virtue of charity.

It seems when I had this epiphany that it opened my eye to the world around me. I didn't feel powerless or without hope. There was a chance to change the world. It was a beautiful feeling to be able to change the world and not accept it. I felt more confident in myself than I had ever felt before in my life. People started to respect me, people that

didn't even know who I was. Such a feeling was rare among my generation, whom had forsaken kindness and charity for cynicism and selfishness.

One of the few phrases to describe the situation in High School is the following, “(10) 002.273 □(Charity is) for those in need, who, in Allah's cause are restricted (from travel), and cannot move about in the land, seeking (For trade or work): the ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are free from want. Thou shalt know them by their (Unfailing) mark: They beg not importunately from all the sundry. And whatever of good ye give, be assured Allah knoweth it well.”(Quran)

Being alone during the walk down “The Hill”, the hill that led down to the Jamaica Ave and the Jamaica Bus Terminal, left me with many questions about me with many questions about the legitimacy regarding my actions. It steadily became apparent that making these self-righteous and charitable actions would not make me popular. I self-alienated myself from the student masses that I had come to respect me. I began looking for those that needed my help and in turn would leave the masses of other students behind to pursue my moral and charitable work.

It leads to an inevitable conclusion that the masses when confronted with an anomaly that they tend to fear and despise it. To some people I represented a view that their parents had preached for, and in turn, they hated for those years of your life are for rebellion and not harmony or kindness. The more they saw me doing what I was doing the more they isolated me or maybe I isolated myself from the general population. They always made it their duty to point out every person that was in need to me no matter what their location or need. It started to annoy me but I kept committed to my beliefs and kept going.

I had made a commitment to a belief that I could not fail. Sir Edmund Hillary summed it up best what it takes to be heroic, "You don't have to be a fantastic heroto do certain things - to compete. You can be just an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals."(Motivational and Inspirational Quotes about "*Heroism and Heroic Deeds*") This phrase summed up the best motivational speech to say to those people that would have doubted me. It doesn't take a superhero to change the world. You just need the motivation and audacity to see adversity in the face and confront it.

Work Cited

1. Ahmad, Shakeel. <http://www.biharanjuman.org/charity.htm>. Web. 30 september. 2012.

2. Sir Edmund Hillary. <http://www.motivational-inspirational-corner.com/getquote.html?categoryid=180>. Web. 30 september 2012.