

Topic: The Virtue of having Compassion Towards Others

Name: Luis Gualpa

CUNY College: Queens College

Date: November 14, 2020

Luis Gualpa

November 14 2020

Compassion, Not Judgement

“What is that you express in your eyes? It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life” were words written brilliantly by a long dead poet named Walt Whitman. That one quote, to me, encapsulates all that surrounds the meaning of compassion and the willingness to understand and not crudely judge another human being. I owe this mature understanding of such virtue to not one singular person but to many, who guided me in understanding that judging is easy but going out of your way to understand the person and their character could shed light on the ignorances, intolerances and most of all, fears that you unknowingly possess.

My mother and father are immigrants who had come to the United States in hopes of a better life, working many odd jobs along their way to support a family of five. This story is very commonplace and is shared by many people living in the United States to some varying degree. My parents were not very formally educated beyond high school, their vocabulary bank for the English language was scarce to none with the exception of the words “speak” and “Spanish” as well as a few hand gestures, which when tied together prompted an incomplete question that should have meant “do you speak Spanish?”

Despite my parents having very limited education, no formal skills to take on a decent paying job, and having known absolutely no English, they never faltered in doing right by their family. My parents resolved in working in construction or maintenance jobs, the types of jobs often labeled as “odd jobs” where like so many immigrants whose stories are more similar than not, are the only jobs available to people with similar backgrounds. Just imagine navigating your way in a society where everything is foreign to you but the reality is that you are the foreigner,

whose only way of survival is to work tirelessly and relentlessly in jobs where you can easily be replaced by someone similar to you; no education, no skills, and no English but whose dreams and aspirations is that their children can go on to become something they're not and live a life that they can't.

In retrospect, knowing what I know now, it makes me appreciate my parents all the more and it humbles me in ways that I can't even begin to describe, I am forever in their debt, however, I didn't always have this way of viewing things and appreciating them. I took my parent's effort for granted and growing up I could even recall being embarrassed by them. I would judge them and cast them blame when I couldn't live the spoiled life that few of my friends had, a life that I had desired. So-and-so got a new playstation, and this other kid is going to Florida for the summer, this other kid had lived in a house, which by my standards of living in an apartment, I had considered it a mansion, I would always compare and never quite measure up to what I thought was a life I had desired, never appreciating and making due with what I had.

I was envious and naive to a fault, this resulted in many acts of rebelliousness throughout my younger years as a kid, call it an act of attention-seeking or just blatant stupidity and ungratefulness. Growing up in Elmhurst Queens, I was ignorant of the fact that many kids had a similar life, parents working odd jobs, with at least one of them working two jobs in succession, some of them even recycled bottles and cans in exchange for the nickels that would accumulate to the dollars necessary to buy a few things.

I became older and with it more mature. I soon realized that the kid who got that new playstation had the discipline to save up enough of his money from mowing lawns, and taking care of his siblings for a few hours until his parents came home from work. The other kid who went to Florida was in fact visiting an ailing grandmother, and the kid who had lived in a house

was renting out the upper floors to other people and living in the basement with his family.

Nothing is ever what it seems at first glance or even the second, or third, it takes time to really understand that most people in this world are just living and making due with what they have.

My parents were no exception and I began to develop compassion for them and their collective efforts.

To this day, I still try to understand from where that feeling of embarrassment has once stemmed from or why it was even embarrassment that I had felt towards my parents. I think it comes down to race, injustice, and the great divide that sows the very foundation of this country. Growing up, I would remember looking at the news and witnessing people termed “immigrants” and newpersons spewing out the word “alien” which would then be followed by the word “deportation”. I would remember reading in newspapers about angry people upset over losing their jobs to immigrants or the fear that immigrants would replace them because immigrants take lesser pay for lesser jobs in this country, jobs that nobody wants to take on. This was back during the Great Recession of 2008, and while I understood that the fear about being jobless and not being able to provide for a family is palpable, I never understood the racism that went along with it.

The people being deported that the media often portrayed looked like me, the people working odd jobs looked like me, the people who were often exposed to racism and bigotry for not knowing the English language or speaking it well, looked like me. Race is deeply entrenched in this country, everyone is aware of it but afraid to speak their minds on it in an unfiltered and cathartic manner. I would think maybe subconsciously this is where the embarrassment that I once had towards my parents stemmed from.

Education is honestly still a good option and one of the few escape routes to move up an echelon or two in this society. People like to bash it and excuse themselves as the next-to-be billionaire prodigies, like they too will become the next Bill Gates or the next Mark Zuckerberg and while although that is possible, they fail to realize that these people had strong support systems, their parents were accomplished, and if they hadn't built the companies they had, they'd likely would've finished college or would've ended up in some white-collar job. I certainly did not have such a support system, but that shouldn't be an excuse to not get what I want in life. I treasure my education because I know with it, I can repay but still never admittedly come close to understanding what my parents went through and the efforts they've made to ensure the life I live.

In his book, *Crime and Punishment*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote "It takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently." I resonate with this quote because no matter how many books you bury your face in to absorb difficult concepts that no average person would know, it takes empathy to understand someone in the interest of truly helping them. I try to commit a small act of kindness in my life, mostly by sharing a few words of encouragement to any who feels down or doubts themselves, this is my way of practicing compassion, it may not be much but to me it's everything.

Lastly, I always try to remember whenever I set my mind on accomplishing things, to "keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you" which are words written by none other than Walt Whitman. I particularly like this quote because it signifies redemption from all the ignorances, intolerances and most of all, fears that I may still have. I'm in many ways still imperfect but I'm also in many ways still learning and I believe that by practicing the virtue of compassion, it has made all the difference in my life.

Sources:

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. Modern Library, 1950.

Whitman, Walt, Unknown, Unknown,

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1438.Walt_Whitman

Whitman, Walt, Unknown, Unknown,

https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/walt_whitman_384665