

AppliedEI – An example of Regard for Others

Near the river the man and his wife spread quilts on the grass and prepared a meagre picnic lunch, asking me to join them. I shared the food I had in my pack. After the meal, I thanked the family and rose to leave.

'Wait,' said the father. 'My son wishes to teach you a phrase in Tibetan.' He motioned to one of the boys, who was about five years old. The little one stepped forward and looked me straight in the eyes. He said happily, 'Tashi deley.'

I nodded, understanding, repeating the phrase. He smiled from ear to ear. 'In Kham, in eastern Tibet,' said the boy's father to me, 'we greet all people this way. For several years now, it is again allowed.' I felt my chest tighten, remembering my experiences with the elder who, fifteen years before, had lost his entire family for saying such a greeting, a prayer, aloud. The man brought his palms together in front of his chest and his wife and children repeated the gesture. 'It means,' he said, 'I honour the greatness in you. I honour the place in your heart where lives your courage, honour, love, hope and dreams. I honour the place in you where, if you are at that place in you and I am at that place in me, there is only one of us. Tashi deley.'

'Wordlessly, I brought my palms together in front of my heart and looked into the eyes of this family, people who, only an hour before, had been total strangers to me.

'Tashi deley.' I said.

'Now, teach my children a word in English, please.' asked the father in Tibetan.

I thought for a moment and said, 'In America, when we greet each other we say "Hello". I remembered a professor once telling me it was Thomas Eddison who had popularised the use of the word.

'Hello!' shouted the children, beaming. 'Hello! Hello!'

I grinned at them. And then something happened that I will never forget. One of the youngest boys came up to me and tugged on my sleeve. 'In America,' he asked expectantly, 'when people say 'Hello,' do they honour the greatness in each other?'

His question struck a chord in me. At once I felt tears brimming up in my eyes as I looked into his earnest, bright face.

'No,' I said, and then I added, 'but I wish they did.'

Think about it. When you greet other people at work, in your travels and at home, what – exactly – do you feel?

Do you look everyone in the eye? Without a word, do you honour the greatness in them, even if they are strangers? Or has greeting other human beings become, more often than not, a rote formality, something shallow and distant, going through the motions? It took a journey to Tibet to make me realise that, by and large, it had for me. It was then and there that I made a promise to myself that I would do all I could not to let it happen again.

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