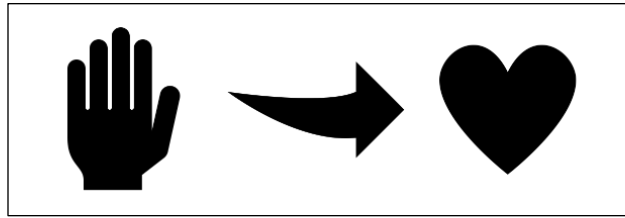


From Hand to Heart

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May 17, 2020



As I have started to consider my re-entry into the Covid-19 world, I considered what behaviors might I adopt to keep myself and others safe. I'm committed to wearing a mask, maintaining appropriate distance and limiting the number of people I am around. But in addition, I began thinking about the natural greeting of shaking hands and giving hugs to friends and acquaintances and new people I will meet.

I have always enjoyed the handshake. It told me something about the person I am meeting. I never hesitated to extend my hand or accept the offer from another. But, understanding the realities of Covid-19, I believe now is the time to reconsider this deep tradition of greeting.

As I mulled on this behavioral change, I wondered how did this all start? My research found that the handshake dates back to the 5th century B.C. in Greece. It was a symbol of peace, showing that neither person was carrying a weapon, or meant no harm to the other. Over the years it reflected sealing a deal or promise; as well as a sign of friendship.

Across the world different cultures use different behaviors to greet one another beyond a handshake. Examples include a kiss on each cheek (many Europeans and Arabic nations), bumping noses (Oman) and/or foreheads (Maori), pressing hands together and a bow (Namaste in India), or simply a bow (China and Japan), sticking out your tongue (Tibet), or as in Malaysia where they lightly touch a person's hand and return their hands to their heart.

I began to think more about hand to heart significance and what that means in America. In the U.S. we place our right hand over our heart when we recite the Pledge of Allegiance. This shows loyalty, respect, dignity and honor. Research published in the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior (2014) "four studies demonstrated that the emblematic gesture associated with honesty (putting a hand on one's heart) increased the level of honesty perceived by others, **and** increased the honesty shown in one's own behavior."

So, next time we meet, or you introduce me to a friend or colleague, I have chosen to forego the handshake and instead greet with my hand to my heart. Please know I do this out of respect for your and my health, safety and well-being. Might you join me in starting a culture movement?