

# TWO GREAT LIFE ADVANTAGES

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH (#5)

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Perhaps the two greatest gifts, bestowed by parents, that enable a fulfilling human life, are:

(1) **believing oneself to be lovable**, and

(2) **being lovable**.

Both are acquired in the pre-school years.

## GIFT 1: BELIEVING ONESELF TO BE LOVABLE

One who believes this, one who has the self-concept of being a loveable being, is well ahead of the pack in many ways. People who have this trait typically:

- accept affection, gifts, praise, favours, kind gestures, opportunities, advantages, friendship, whatever is going – without hesitation or shame or self-doubt;
- ask for what they want confidently, clearly, openly, without apology or clumsy attempts to “prove” that they deserve what they are asking for (such a simple, open style of asking is the most successful);
- enter into new territory and opportunities with less fear, believing that they will be welcomed, accepted and thanked for their presence. Their internalised script, that **they'll love me**, is usually self-fulfilling. People are generally treated as they expect to be treated.

How does one **acquire** this golden advantage? All one has to do is be loved in one's first months of life – say the first year. How is this love shown?

- warmth and affection freely and regularly given for no other reason than that the little one is experienced as a treat<sup>1</sup>;
- care and responsiveness when baby has needs, only gradually introducing “natural” delays into the response;

- engagement in play, humour, games, and joint exploration of the world around us;
- communication activities, words, singing, reading, other vocal effects, gestures, body language, tone of voice. It doesn't matter that the child may not yet understand most of the vocabulary. The gestures of communication, tone of voice, and the sounds of the language are all vital acquisitions – upon which successful communication skills will be built.

## GIFT 2: BEING LOVABLE

One who freely gives to others, listens to them, responds to their needs, treats them caringly, emits warmth, entertains, supports and applauds others' successes, will always be valued. The properly socialised individual is sought out and trusted. People who have this trait typically:

- start an exchange on a positive note, inviting the other, in word and gesture, to respond in kind;
- try to give, help, lend, visit, host, share with, engage and encourage the other,
- don't deceive for personal gain, undermine, gossip to injure, or stand superior over one who has suffered a loss of face or who has a lower societal status.

How does one **acquire** this blessed quality of benevolence? All one has to do is to be raised in **sociality** in one's early years of life – say the first three/four years. How is this done?

The essence of inculcating successful social habits in the very young is **giving authentic personal responses** to them. As much as possible, interact unselfconsciously with the

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<sup>1</sup> The parent who embraces the care of the new person as their primary goal for the next 18 years can do this.

infant. Spontaneously display pleasure when an attractive behaviour is displayed. But when a behaviour is displayed which offends – dangerous actions, ugly noises, actions which in the local culture are considered vandalistic, actions which are considered violent to others – do not reward them, do not pretend it did not happen, but display a reaction. Not a long-winded lecture, but a short utterance displaying disapproval, and if necessary, a physical intervention to minimise the damage against person or property. The important **vibe** of your response is that you are providing guidance **for the new person's sake** because **you want them to succeed in life**.

Babies are very responsive to vibes. Don't terrify the infant with excessively forceful utterances and gestures, but give a response which displays your attitude to the behaviour. The aim is that they get to know what offends, not to crush their initiative to try other behaviours, some of which will be splendid.

When possible, enable the infant to interact with other infants. They give instant responses without explanation. Unrefined reactions from other children are an essential source of socialisation. Assess new potential playmates to ensure that there are not dangerous potential weapons or unusually dangerous behaviours, but as far as possible allow spontaneous interaction.

If a parent has difficulty deciding to engage the natural and developmental way to interact with a toddler, they need only meditate briefly on these inescapable facts of life:

- their infant will grow up and become an adult sooner than they think;
- the parent won't be there to supervise adult relationships, work life, or much else;
- any parent's natural duty is to give the next generation their best chance of a successful life;

- the lucky child is confident and behaves attractively<sup>2</sup>;
- doing this job properly will bring more joy & less pain to the full life-span of both parent and child.

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POSTSCRIPT:

What happens to those who significantly **lack** these most blessed of traits?

Well, there are degrees, but the unfortunate extremes are:

- **those who believe they are lovable, but who are poorly raised and treat others badly.** All charm and no care. These types sometimes get away with an awful lot, but they may have to keep changing their "friends", who eventually get sick of them. In the long haul they end up lonely. Alternatively, they have the option of earnestly learning, as an adult, how to treat people;
- **those who don't believe they are lovable, but have learned how to be very kind to others.** These people are of course sometimes exploited by others, but they gradually learn how to look after themselves, and slowly accumulate more caring friends; and
- **those poor wretches who don't believe they are lovable AND who don't know how to treat others.** These ones may feel that the only way to happiness is to "steal" it – through crime or hard drugs.

When I contemplate this final category, I am reminded of the woman in the supermarket with the t-shirt which reads: *life's a bitch and then you die*.

In these cases, one is looking for special help: a counsellor, a guardian angel, a saint, a saviour – some kind of miracle.□

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<sup>2</sup> In most cases, within minutes of engaging with another, personality trumps physical features.