

How I Got Blessed Today on the Train

Shôn Ellerton, November 12, 2019

Many of us avoid eye contact and ignore anyone doing something weird or out of the ordinary. But doing so might miss the opportunity of a positive experience.



A typical morning. Wake up at the crack of dawn. Throw some cereal together. Drink a glass of sour grapefruit juice. Sneak out the front door before anyone else wakes up. Perambulate to the train station and wait for the train at the usual spot, knowing full well that the train will miraculously stop precisely at the same spot so that the door will present itself right in front of me.

I then find, bizarrely enough, the same seat unoccupied in front of a fellow commuter by the name of Rodney. He sits there slumping away in a deep sleep only to wake up when we screech to a halt at Adelaide's train terminus.

I do my usual thing by reaching for my book inside my rucksack. This time, a substantial non-fictional tome called *Homo Deus* by Yuval Harari and start to read the next couple of chapters during my 25-minute journey into the city. Everybody else, except for Rodney of course, is glued to a smartphone. The electric train is quiet enough so that one could hear the tinny sounds of cacophony emanating from a multitude of headphones.

After ten minutes into the journey, I start to take notice of a tingly bell sound followed by footsteps going up and down the corridor of the train. I glance up from my book and fix my eyes on an elderly woman of Indian descent wearing incredibly bright orange robes adorned with an assortment of jewellery and other odd trinkets on her person. She has, in her left hand, a small little bell which she gently rings; not loud or annoying but gentle. In her right hand, she is

holding a plastic-laminated card with three pictures on each side. She has, on her face, a thick coat of white cosmetic paint around her lips and other blobs of colour on her forehead and cheeks which, initially, took me aback by surprise.

No one else on the train took any notice at all. Which I expected.

Me, being a curious sort of fellow, tapped her on the arm when she passed by. I was conscious that, doing so, she might have taken it the wrong way expecting me to tell her off for traipsing up and down the train. I quickly dispelled any potential fear by kindly asking her who the people were on the card. She beamed a big smile and said that the young person in the black-and-white photo is a picture of her when she was a girl. On either side are her relatives and family. Another picture on the back is a picture of Krishna, one of the major deities in Hinduism. During this time, she was reminiscing a little about something or another but her accent made it a little difficult to decipher.

She then said that she would like to give me a blessing and I obliged having no idea what to expect. During this dialogue, others in the train stirred wondering what was going on. Who and why was this strange bald-headed man asking questions and willing to receive a blessing from a complete stranger dressed in orange robes armed with a little bell, brandishing a card with photos of her family on it along with Krishna?

She then reached in her pocket and brought forward four little individually wrapped orange boiled sweets, one for each member of the family. I said I had three members in my household, but she gave me an extra one for luck. I extended my left hand, but she corrected me in that I had to receive them in my right hand. I asked if she was collecting for a charity, but she did not appear to want anything from me. She simply said thank you for having a talk with her and wished me a merry Christmas, even though it is early November.

It's certainly not the first time I've talked to a complete stranger who, at first view, looks or behaves completely out of kilter alongside everyone else. I've encountered and talked to homeless people sleeping on benches on my daily walk to work. Each had an interesting story to tell. On a few occasions, I randomly started talking to a wandering soul with Tourette syndrome seemingly angrily shouting expletives and nonsense. To my surprise, when I started talking to them, most of them 'lost' their symptoms of Tourettes and started to converse in a very convivial and bizarrely normal way only to revert to what they were doing once we said our goodbyes.

It's funny how human nature naturally shuns such anomalies in our everyday surroundings. Those I encountered above are either seeking attention or simply

need help; however, most of us do everything possible not to make eye contact with them. Some of us *do* take notice and that can make for a positive experience.

I still don't know what she was talking about though...