



DIGNITY

By Wayne Visser

~ Dignity is the saving grace of humanity ~

Which leaders do you admire for their dignity?
What is it about their attitude, or their behaviour, that distinguishes them?
What does it mean to live, and to die, with dignity?

Dignity implies being able to hold your head up high, to be proud of your actions, to be unashamed of the way in which you carry yourself in the world.
Not because you are better than others, or holier than thou; on the contrary, because you are the same as others, equally worthy.

Dignity is the worth we bestow on ourselves and others when we affirm our common humanity.
Dignity draws on what is good in human beings – our generosity, our compassion, our selflessness – not because it wishes to deny what is bad, but because it believes that we have the choice.
Our higher nature can transcend our baser selves, if we cultivate the strength of our principles.

We respect the world's great moral leaders, past and present, because of the difficult choices they made.
They chose forgiveness over revenge, love over hate, service over success.

The worst embodiments of evil in the history of the world – whether people, or political regimes or religious doctrines – were all attempts to strip people of their basic human dignity, their inherent worth as people, their intrinsic value as citizens.

Prejudice is the destroyer of dignity.
When we are prejudiced against someone because of their colour or creed, their nationality or sexual preference, their looks or weight, we are denigrating them, devaluing their personality, degrading their humanity.
We are judging them on artificial scales and sentencing them on superficial grounds.

We all have prejudices.
They are drummed into us by our parents, taught by our schools, and ritualised by our religions.
We are blinded by our cultures, brainwashed by the media and seduced by our hubris.
Dignity is the ability to recognise prejudice for the false god that it is, and choose instead to affirm each person's inherent value as a human being.

Ironically, it is often those whose dignity is most assaulted who find it within themselves to respond to their persecutors in a dignified manner.
Many of our most admired icons are those who refused to treat others in the same dehumanising way in which they themselves were treated.
Mahatma Ghandi responded to active violence with passive resistance, Martin Luther King responded to racism with a dream of harmony between black and white, and Nelson Mandela forgave his captors and sought to unify those whom apartheid had rent apart.





At the heart of dignity is the unshakeable belief that no one person is better, or worse, than another.
Delusions of superiority, even under the guise of self-righteousness, are a poison in the blood of dignity.
Likewise, feelings of inferiority are a malignant cancer which eats away at the body of dignity.

We should not think that dignity is only a task for the heroic amidst the melodrama of historical injustice.
Every moment of the day, in small yet significant ways, we affirm or deny dignity in our lives.

Dignity is all in the way we regard others.
Do we judge them superficially, or do we look beyond surface appearances?
Do we see them through the tainted lens of prejudice, or do we treat them as equals?
Do we build them up based on their strengths and potential, or do we break them down based on their weaknesses and failings?

Treating others with dignity, however, is impossible unless we have discovered our own sense of self-worth.
Do we believe in our own fundamental value as human beings?
Do we have faith in our own ability to make a contribution in this world?
Do we feel connected to a source of inspiration that guides us in the realisation of our divine potential?

Dignity is not a free inheritance, but something we have to work at.
It is not a miraculous gift of the saints, but a habit which we have to nurture with intent.
Yet, unlike prejudice which is learned, dignity is an act of remembrance.
For our original state as humans is one of dignity.

We all share the same dream on this day, and throughout our lives, and that is to be treated with dignity and respect, to be valued for who we are as human beings.
So let us give as we hope to receive – because you're worth it, and so am I.



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