

The Cost of Discourse.

The man sat thinking for several days, until eventually speaking out loud to the silence surrounding him, “When I authenticate an opinion, by agreement or disagreement, I might believe I’m in a harmless conversation, but the person I’m conversing with may harbour unpredictable differences. And retrieving their trust might be impossible once my differing opinion is expressed.”

The man took a deep breath before continuing, “Some people say they want a debate, but instead they bluster and browbeat you, which is far too common in today's discourse, as are the consequences of alienating those you once considered friends. Of course, there are options: staying within the group of people who always agree with you, or, as I have chosen, opting out of society as much as possible.”

The man stopped speaking aloud and thought, “*Yet we all, sometimes, feel the need to engage in communication in the arena we refer to as society or even more often, social media.. The younger the person, the older the person, the experienced and the naïve, all have opinions waiting and yearning to be expressed. Differing opinions can be painful to the ears of others, and questioning that pain can fuel further painful retorts.*

The man then remembered reading something Dostoevsky wrote:

Walk
on your broken foot
and leave no trace
of your hand
on another's
shoulder.

Talking once again to emptiness around him, “Imagine my surprise when, having badly broken my foot, I walked on it for more than a year as it slowly and at times, excruciatingly healed while not using another person's shoulder for support. Why did I do that? I learned too early that friendship and loyalty are indistinct, vague, and are already defined in us before we ever meet. So, not knowing the emotional buttons I might inadvertently push simply by saying something I think is common knowledge or innocuous, I rely on myself instead of others.”

“An example of me innocently pushing an emotional button is I recently told an acquaintance that I believed in a higher power but not religion. Immediately, their voice became stern and loud, and they scolded me. It seemed to me that I had pushed an existential button, and it was paramount that their religious belief not be questioned, as that was foundational to their life.”

The man again thought, *“Perhaps each of us needs to look within for our truths instead of looking out and expecting or demanding that others validate our beliefs on how life should be lived. My life’s goal is to find out who I am and why I am here, and by doing so, I hope to give credibility to others to pursue their life’s goals.”*

“I believe we won’t know who we are or why we’re here until we find out for ourselves.”

Written by Peter Skeels © 9-18-2025