

THE JOY OF CONSCIOUS LIVING – Part IV

Gratitude for Toilet Paper

By Sue Singleton, Med. Int., MHT, CST, EOLMTT

Aaron and I have thus far had four magical journeys to Egypt. We were the spiritual leaders for three trips, awakening the ancient initiates within our travelers' hearts and souls, as we explored and performed ceremony in many temples. We love the Egyptian people for their open-heartedness and amazing sense of humor.



As you might expect, an impoverished country has a different way of perceiving many things than average Americans and Europeans. For example, deciduous trees from which paper is made do not grow in this expansive desert country. Therefore, few Egyptians can afford toilet paper in their homes. In fact, they do not really “need” or “want” it. Their culture has adapted to the expense of toilet paper, in its own way. I will not elaborate on the details in this article, as this is more about us tourists, and about gratitude. Gratitude for toilet paper. Gratitude for small acts of kindness.



Because most tourists anticipate toilet paper in the rest rooms, enterprising citizens who honestly deserve to earn cash to feed their families, sell toilet paper in the lavatories. There is none in the stalls. During our first three trips, 2 squares of single-ply toilet paper cost 1 Egyptian Pound (round about 20 American cents).

Of course, I gladly paid, happy to help out. Fortunately, I had an inkling about this before our trip, so I carried my own toilet paper in my shoulder bag. I used this as my “reserve” supply, in case the 2 squares of single-ply were insufficient. You know, those times when a little more is happening than a simple pee. And oh boy, what if you got some food poisoning, a disaster waiting to happen!

Toilet paper is a precious commodity, something to be respected, revered, and used in moderation. This practice of having gratitude for toilet paper has never left me. Even today, I am very conscious about how many squares I truly need for the matter at hand.

Another incident helped me realize how much we can truly be “ugly Americans” by taking things out of the context of the beautiful culture and people we are visiting. In one hotel, after Aaron and I unpacked, we realized we had a mold issue in the room. Aaron was off wandering as I consulted with the front desk, who immediately dispatched a handsome young Egyptian man to move us to another room. Where was my husband, when I needed help to move? My Egyptian friend said, “No worry, madame. I will take care of you.” He handily put everything on a cart and ceremoniously moved me to the new room, and waited for my approval that it was perfect. It was.

I reached into my wallet seeking a US\$5 or \$10 (we had just arrived in Egypt, so I had no Egyptian pounds). I had only a \$20 bill. I smiled and handed it to my handsome valet, who jumped away from me, crying out “NO! NO! Too much! I cannot take. I want NOTHING!” I took a deep breath, and realized that this was an enormous amount of money to him. It was about 3-4 months of his pay (I learned later). The more I insisted, the more he said “No.”

Although he did not speak a lot of English, I knew he understood much more. I said, "Please listen." I reached out and clasped both my hands around one of his, and placed the \$20 bill there, and refused to let go of his hand. I said, "I truly, truly want you to have this, it means so much to me to give this to you..." at which time I unexpectedly burst into tears. He began to cry also. We both smiled these huge smiles with tears streaming down our faces. It was one of the most touching moments of my life. After a few moments, he jumped up and down with incredible joy, "Thank you, thank you!" He felt like he had just won Mega-Millions with my simple \$20 bill.

I've been humbled by these, and so many experiences. I am sincerely grateful that I did not have any smaller bills on me that day. I think many of us take a lot of things for granted, such as food on the table and a roof over our heads. I am grateful for food, shelter...and toilet paper.



This is the fourth installment in Sue Singleton's article series, The Joy of Conscious Living, in which Sue shares – in her own light-hearted yet deeply personal way – the insights that she has discerned from various experiences throughout her fully-embraced journey through life.

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