



WHEN MATERIALISM BECOMES IMMATERIAL

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I recall, though not very distinctly, a time in the distant past when a certain actress was heavily maligned for bringing her various home gadgets and conveniences and a selection of get-ups to the shooting of a certain movie (or was it a TV commercial?). As you can see, I have said 'distant' simply because the details escape me now. But I do remember at least two of the people involved, but for my own personal safety, I shall not name names. Anyway, the incident did end well for all concerned, and the furor and idle talk about it all soon died down.

One can't blame the lovely actress for bringing almost her entire kitchen, and maybe a sixteenth of her undoubtedly large wardrobe for one shoot: she's acknowledged as one of the most fashionable personalities in the biz, with the face that could rival even Helen of Troy's. Any woman would give anything to have what she has: beauty; fame; wealth; and a possibly cavernous walk-in closet that gets regularly refreshed. And anyone can see she's happy, tremendously happy. I guess happiness and fulfillment do come in uncommon packages.

Elsewhere in the world, one can find pictures of happiness in other people's faces. We see people having a wonderful time at events considered to be the coolest ones on earth. We see people getting enamored with the hippest clothes available online, the glitziest jewelry, the costliest perfumes, or the newest technological advancement. Despite the diminished buying power people have had, realty companies continue to market state-of-the-art condos and real property while auto companies regularly come out with their latest car models loaded with the most revolutionary components that have ranged from on-board DVD players (airlines have had them for a time), to GPS, auto-navigation systems and WiFi. The wonders of the modern era will surely continue to bombard the senses, and for a long time yet to come.

However, in the midst of all the materialistic noise there is, let us all pause for a minute and think of those elsewhere in the world who are unable to enjoy the benefits of clean, potable water. Somewhere around the globe, even in the streets of the most powerful nation in the world, are homeless people who rely on the generosity of others to get by. Somewhere out there is a child who can't enjoy exchanging text messages with his friends simply because there isn't any development for electricity in his area. Somewhere, there's always someone who has to struggle just to survive daily.

Somehow, for these people, happiness is nowhere to be found, and all the material things that the rest of the world enjoys are immaterial.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How can rich nations help poorer nations more profoundly? Do loans and donations really work?
2. Why do many succeed where others fail? What is the most important component of success?
3. If you won the lottery, what would be the first thing you would do? Is sharing one of your options?
4. Is there an obligation that exists for powerful people to ease the burden of their less fortunate fellowmen? Elaborate on your answer.
5. Is it always easy to be generous? Why or why not?