

To begin with, I must emphasize that this essay is the product of an important discussion between myself and two close friends. On a beautiful, cool night on the island of Rhodes, Dr. Büşra Ersanlı, Sesto Giovanni, a Swiss citizen, and myself shared a brief but profound conversation. Sesto Giovanni, without being misled by the scintillating, attractive life of the materialist West, encompassed the wisdom of the East with the expression “**Ex Oriente Lux**” (Light rises from the East). Büşra Ersanlı, for her part, is a teaching faculty member at Marmara University, whose heart is as open as her mind, and whose mind is as capacious as her heart.

Come, without pause or hesitation let us begin by shedding and discarding specific identities, titles, and positions to the greatest degree possible, and thereby forge a bridge of communication with our colleagues, our friends, and those with whom we share the same space. Let us remove those social masks that typically hang in front of the truth like a curtain. Let us do this in order to understand the meaning of truth, life, and humanity, so that we can appreciate those opportunities that so often pass us by.

Let us put aside those artifices that we invoke even in a normal telephone conversation: the pretentious introduction, “I am Professor Doctor so-and-so”, or worse yet, the obstinate bad manners of those who say “*Don't you know who I am?*”; the fact that we might be famous or unknown journalists; our true roots, our sizes and shapes, our family backgrounds; the fact that we have worked for so many years in an important institution or business; membership with a particular ethnicity or religion that we have so often used as a means of establishing domination over others; our secular or religious affiliations; even our chosen political parties and football teams. Let us put all of these things aside so that we establish a relationship with “the Other.”

Just like Yunus Emre's famous expression: “I wrapped the flesh around the bone, and then as Yunus I was known.” Just like the pure, clean state that we possessed as new-born infants.

Whatever happens to constitute our own experience and knowledge, let us communicate and share with these Others, in the name of humanity, in the name of virtue, in the name of values, and in the name of beauty.

Let us speak to those in our presence as other human beings, without immediately commenting on the make of our automobile, without using our famous friends or the neighborhoods which we live in as crutches. Let us speak **with** others, not **at** others like a preacher, declaiming from above.

Let me relate a story that occurred almost twenty years ago. On a holiday afternoon, I was sitting with my wife near the seashore in the city, drinking tea and taking in the atmosphere. Suddenly, an argument broke out just beside us, which immediately upset our cheerful mood. The argument was between the driver of a Mercedes that was attempting to enter a prohibited area near the seashore and a traffic policeman, who had stopped the Mercedes:

Driver: “*But I'm...a Member of Parliament...*”

Traffic Policeman: *“I’m sorry sir, but in this context, for me, you’re just the operator of a vehicle. I have to write you a ticket.”*

Somehow, I managed to escape the notice of this Parliamentarian, now deceased, at whose home I had previously shared tea and conversation. Nor do I know whether the policeman is still alive, but his words that day were undeniably meaningful: *“In this context, for me, you’re just the operator of a vehicle.”*

The policeman, who was only doing his duty as a public official, invited his interlocutor to shed his identity and his title. If only we all had such friends near us to provide such cautionary, prudent words from time to time.

Friends, a mania for consumption, bad manners, and arrogance have gone to our heads! As we consume, we begin to imagine that we will become famous, but what we have really consumed are our humanity, our friends, and an understanding of life as filled with beauty and grace.

The poet **Yannis Ritsos** (1909-1950) expressed the *“Importance of Simplicity”* beautifully:

*“I conceal myself behind simple things.*

*You will find me there.*

*If you don’t find me, you will touch the very things which I have touched,*

*And our fingerprints will become one.”*

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*Every word opens like a door*

*To a meeting overflowing with multiplicity*

*And the word only becomes true when it is met with insistence.”*

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) addressed the Blessed Ali with a beautiful expression:

*“Ali! When people come together, hooray for any one of them!”*

In summary, I offer these words with gratitude to the adherents and defenders of the philosophy of the *“Simple Life,”* which still proclaims itself with a meager voice against the obstinancy of the crowds that fill the sparkling shopping centers and temples of the *“religion of the mania of consumption.”*

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