

Have you ever felt warm or uplifted when you greet someone, even a stranger? I have. According to psychological research, such interactions are called ‘micro-moments of connections.’ These moments, they say, have a much stronger impact on us than we think. They strengthen not only our emotional well-being, but also our physical well-being by enhancing our immune systems, and bringing us a sense of happiness.

An international survey conducted in 2024 reveals that only 57% of people in Japan said they feel happy. This is a decrease of 13% from the same survey in 2011. Despite Japan being a most developed country, why aren’t more of us happy?

With this question in mind, I found research from Harvard University that says people who are more connected with others feel happier.

Now, historically speaking, do you know how the word ‘happiness’ was expressed with Chinese characters six hundred years ago? The characters meant ‘to serve and help each other’. An expert says that it is in this broad connections with nature, society, and history that Japanese people have found happiness since ancient time. To me, these suggest that throughout times and cultures, ‘connections’ matter to people to feel happy.

In modern-day Japan, however, these connections are fading in this social media age. According to a government survey, over the last fifty years, the number of people who claim to have close ties with their neighbors has dropped by one sixth to nine percent. Another problem is people’s reluctance to interact with strangers. I came across alarming news this summer that a middle-aged man died of a heart attack on a Yamanote line, and no one noticed his death for twelve hours. Heart-breaking. If only someone had just a little courage to try talking to him, perhaps his life could’ve been saved.

Is it really that hard for us to connect on a human level? And what can we do to reverse this trend of fading connections? I needed an answer. So, this summer, I decided to join community events to find ways to connect with people. One was Rajio Taisou, a two-week morning exercise in a local park. There, I tried a little experiment using a simple, age-old method of greeting: “Ohayou gozaimasu!” With the group members, I actively greeted with a smile. The result? Positive! In fact, greetings became a source of my vitality. Plus, I made some acquaintances! My conclusion was that simple greetings are a powerful tool that helps to create a sense of community around us. ‘Micro-moments of connections’ do work, not only emotionally and physically, but also at a community level.

So, here is my suggestion: why don’t we all start using more greetings as a first step to revive a sense of connections among us?

Last but not least, here is wisdom from Mother Teresa. “Watch your actions, for they become your habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

Let’s all make greetings a part of our everyday habits. Then, sharing ‘micro-moments of connections’ may become part of the ‘character’ of our society, leading to a brighter ‘destiny’ for this country, with more people sharing a sense of happiness with each other.

So, why don't we start this right now? Turn to the person next to you and say “hello!”

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The Power of Your Greetings