

Say Please and Thank You & Stand in Line

By Dany Assaf

This book is rooted in the tradition of saying please and thank you and standing in line because these values remain an enduring creed to build upon and rally around. It symbolizes Canada. A place where you respect and are respected, and where everyone, rich or poor, big or small, white, or black, new or old, are expected to play by the same rules and no one is above the law. It captures our dreams of equity, opportunity, and hope with an inclusive meritocracy as our north star, and it doesn't ask who we are in our journey toward what we can all be.

The complexion of contemporary Toronto is unique. It is now the most multicultural city in the world, with 230 nationalities and 140 languages, and I'm sure every single one of them was in Nathan Phillips Square as the Raptors arrived on the team bus. It is one thing to read statistics about Toronto's remarkable diversity in race, religion, and nationality, and quite another to find yourself in a moment where you are completely immersed in it. The New York Times ran an article under the headline "The Raptors Win, and Canada Learns to Swagger" and captured the moment with these words: in addition to all those ball caps, "there were turbans and hijabs... Everyone was represented, and everyone was representing... Never before had I felt more connected to our flag."

Now, with the world as it is, it feels like history is calling us to either harness the power of our multicultural assets, socially and economically, at home and on the world stage, or be torn apart by our differences. One need not look far to see what happens when one faction or sect portrays another as the enemy. Sometimes it feels we are in a time when our narcissism is in combat with our willingness to listen to others, leaving little space for us to grow and learn from one another. The consequences are not only the lost opportunities to genuinely fix what's fallen apart but also the mistrust, injustice, and oppression, and sometimes violence and death that this division can bring.

I would never have believed, for instance, that our neighbour to the south could degenerate so quickly into incivility, sanctioned by the highest office in the land. I worry what would await future generations of Canadians if we spend our days trying to find meaning in ourselves through anger at the "other." We must resist. Genuine progress needs to be anchored by trust, mutual respect, and consensus. That is the path to prosperity; the other leads to ruin. Canada, however imperfect, has been as welcoming to diverse peoples as any country on the face of the earth, with so many wonderful results. I've written this book in the hopes that we continue to build on the finest of our heritage—what I like to call the Canadian way—and never lose sight of what is best in us.

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