**College Essay**

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I pulled my headphones out and was thrust back into the cacophony of bantering baristas, coffee orders, and constant pitter-patter of typing. It was an average Saturday afternoon spent working on my laptop in Starbucks. While I was packing up my things, a man told me to look at the “painting” to my right. I turned quizzically, slightly skeptical yet equally intrigued, to see a blank wall. Crazy New Yorkers, scary men… it really was an average Saturday. When I turned back, he urged me to look in my bag. Events like this had occurred before, and I searched my bag expecting to find this 30-something-year-old’s number, or potentially something more dangerous. When I found nothing, I looked up again and was surprised to see the man lingering, backing out of the door but still watching me. I began to think he was too smiley and persistent to be of any real harm, as he told me, “Look again, there’s a gift for you.” Alright, that was a little creepy, but in keeping my belief that all people are inherently pure, I looked again. I found a pale pink flower at the bottom of my bag. I looked up and smiled. I wished everyone acted like this man: genuine, open, and vulnerable, for no reason at all. We grinned at each other.

“That was the most heinous thing I’ve ever seen,” a younger man next to me snickered.

A mere moment ago, I had been like this man. I replied, “Actually… it’s just a flower.”

“Wow. I thought it would be his straw wrapper or something.”

“I know. I thought it would’ve been his number. That’s happened before, but you can’t always assume the worst.”

Baseless love (*ahavat chinam*). The kind gesture reminded me of this mantra preached at my Jewish sustainability sleep away camp, Eden Village. This notion sums up what the man in Starbucks had done: a stranger exhibiting kindness towards another stranger. He had been open with his heart, spreading love just for the sake of it. Eden Village awakened in me a consciousness about changing the world through loving ourselves and those around us, and based on who we are on the inside rather than on the outside.

I am a feminist. In between catcalls, breast augmentation subway ads, and living in a selfie-obsessed culture, I have become acutely aware of the subconscious objectification and self-objectification of women. Our society suffers from an epidemic of the exterior. I had reason to judge Starbucks Man because of past experiences with men. However, I now realize that a central principle of feminism is to regard everyone on a basis of individuality, rather than stereotype. This is where the end of prejudice lies. That is how Starbucks Man regarded me, as a whole person and not as a body belonging to a stereotype. This had caused me to regard him in the same way.

It just goes to show the ripple effect of vulnerability.

This man practiced the philosophies that galvanize me to learn, create, contribute, and engage. Vulnerability in society is punk rock. Sensitivity is strength. Caring, compassion, and identifying one’s feelings is revolutionary, and so unbelievably crucial. Our culture generally does not reflect this man’s actions; it usually objectifies people, especially women, emphasizing the superficial, while diluting human connection. Vulnerability is the key towards saving this connection. I express my vulnerability through writing and music. For me, artistic expression is a boiled down representation of connection and the human experience. It is the cause and the effect of what enables me to truly tap into my essence and my surroundings. Vulnerability makes way for baseless love, something that only truly exists between people’s interiors, not exteriors. To allow oneself to be vulnerable is to experience the complete spectrum of emotion and humanity at its fullest. I look forward to my next Starbucks Encounter.