

DIVE INTO SOME PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS

SIGN UP

COLUMNS


Facebook

Twitter

...

PaulaC - 1 year ago1

Almost, Not Quite Right: Can a Hug Make You Happy?



Ever hear of the Hugging Saint? Mata Amritanamayi, Amma to most, has given out 30 million hugs in her worldwide tours. She’s not Catholic, so technically can’t be canonized. But her life is checklist for sainthood. Humanitarian acts? Check – \$22 million for tsunami relief in India. Legacy? Check- Amma’s India-based foundation runs hospitals, school, orphanages, and soup kitchens. The idea of consoling people through hugs came to Amma as a child. This simple act of love has won her many admirers including A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, India’s former President, who was among the million strong at Amma’s 50th birthday bash in 2003. So when Amma came to New York, I decided to go get a hug for myself.

I guess you could say I’ve been embarrassed that I’ve undertaken so much self-helpy stuff over the years. Within the last year I’ve also put my skeptical yet hopeful foot forward to go to an angel reading and a psychic healing given in my friend’s car. In truth, I think the reality is that a lot of people go these routes until they figure out - ehhhh, that’s not going to work for me. I’m one of you: the self-obsessed, too much thinking, needing just to get on with it folks. I recognize that not everyone has the luxury of time or money to indulge in some of the healing modalities I’ve undertaken. So I see this column, Almost, Not Quite Right as my collection of cautionary motivational tales.


That brings me back to Amma, in all places, at the Hammerstein Ballroom at the Manhattan Center where I arrived a little late for the hug-in. On stage Amma was short and round. I imagined she smelled like butter and flour, or maybe like garam marsala. I was just betting there was something about her that filled the senses. A printed wedding-like program informed it was a night of teaching, chanting, meditation, and then hugs.

Amma spoke and one of her on-stage volunteers translated. It reminded me of a Bob Dylan performance in those later, more unintelligible years where because he’s a legend it didn’t matter that no one knew what he was singing—same with Amma. She could be saying anything just to amuse herself, since it was the translator who delivered the message about love: for family, for humanity, and also romantic love. It was a script to fill the auditorium with hope and compassion.

Phase two involved chanting. Caught up in the moment, I chanted to Shiva, Devi, and other deities with images I had in my head from The Little Book of Hindu Deities, a cartoon book on my sister’s shelf.

At about 2.5 hours in, the crowd moved on to silent meditation. The third eye, the little spot between my two eyes in the middle of my forehead, eluded me. I focused instead on my breathing. With over 500 in attendance, the collective inhalation and exhalation was inspiring. Was this bliss? I wasn’t sure, but I felt calm and relaxed. And then the hugging began!

Like an accounting rule “first in, first hugged” was the priority. Since I showed up late, my turn wouldn’t come for several hours. It was already 11 pm. At first, I thought I could wait it out. I’d entertain myself by browsing the T-shirts, books, teas and vegetarian supplements, all with the likeness of Amma. Phish shows had similar paraphernalia, except Amma didn’t sell glass pipes or hacky sack balls. The



PaulaC
New York

Team SP

Follow

Message

More Perspectives from PaulaC

Do You Still Practice Your Parents' Religion?

107 Responses

Almost, Not Quite Right: Do You Ever See Things Different than Everyone Else?

28 Responses

Do You Mask Fear Behind Other Emotions?

48 Responses

Show More ↓

Is Latisse® right for you?

You'll never know unless you ask your doctor.

FIND A DOCTOR »



By prescription only.
APC10KW11

commercialism was okay by me since Amma uses the money to fund her humanitarian efforts.

I'm not gifted with patience, so I flirted with the guy in charge of the hugging queue to see if I could cut ahead in the line. I could not. But my dimples did get me to a special sitting area a bit closer. My plan thus evolved: I was to forego the hug to instead get a better look at Amma. I'd come back for a hug when I had more time.

The orderliness of the spectacle amazed me. Hug-ees were seated in two rows facing the stage. From chairs, the next step was to kneel, as if the masses were slowly, inexorably crawling to see her. Was this part of the plan? If it was, no one complained. Amma worked the crowd, two hugs at a time. She gazed at each face for a few seconds.

If there was some transformative moment, a miracle, an epiphany, I didn't see it. But maybe what was special was between Amma and the huggee. Something private in such a public space. As a good hug should be.

Could something as simple as a hug lead to happiness?

61 Responses

Recent

Discussed

Liked



What do you think?



hello_roma - 3 months ago

Totally!!! A hug makes your day much nicer!!!!...
The simplest things in life give you joy.
Yesterday It was a rainy day and I had to go to the grocery. I decided to go with flip flops instead of shoes in order to feel the raindrops falling on my skin.
Water made my day happier.

Reply ▾



thatcanuck - 5 months ago

I am totally a converted hugger. For a long time I liked the idea of it, but as strange as it was, I was almost never comfortable giving someone a hug. Every hug, therefore, was a big deal and made me very happy. Having a non-huggy family probably had quite a bit to do with my lack of comfort with casual physical connection, but I brought in some change and had my own personal teddy bear to hug when my baby brother was born. I've also worked in a mostly male-dominated "macho" and/or entirely personally removed environments, so hugs were not a big feature in my life for a long time. Now I work in a place where our motto (or one of many) is to hug it out. We are all over it (pun possibly intended)! The people I work with are my basically my best friends in my now-not-so-new city, and I think the hugging brings us closer - more than just literally. I'm growing into a hugging person, and every hug I've gotten here has made me happy. In fact, there are a few hugs that I would count as some of my happiest memories.

Reply ▾



mediummm - 7 months ago

If both recipients are coming from a place of love than most definitely. A smile or laugh from the same source triggers the same response. SO BE HAPPY PEOPLE and smile more. Maybe even hug people when greeting them, instead of a formal 'shaking'. or a dance greeting, ha that would be awesome. if someone greeted me with their own little dance I would be ecstatic!

Reply ▾



• [watki1hm](#) - 8 months ago

A hug is much like any other act of kindness and therefore it can lead to happiness. I believe that a hug is merely a transfer of happiness between one person to another.

...

Reply ▾



• [thegirlanachronism](#) - 8 months ago

Yes! I think any small act or event can change a person's outlook, it all depends on that person's perspective on it. This reminds me of a quote said by Charlotte Charles from the show Pushing Daisies: "Hugs are like an emotional Heimlich. Someone puts their arms around you and they give you a squeeze and all your fear and anxiety come shooting out of your mouth in a big wet wad and you can breath again."

...

Reply ▾



• [Cordelia76296](#) - 11 months ago

yes, in fact most often a hug is the best, and sometimes only thing that can make me feel happy again. A loving embrace from someone you love is the best cure for the blues.

...

Reply ▾



• [megan_renee](#) - 12 months ago

Yes. Yes. For me, hugs lead to two responses: happiness or tears. Happiness most of the time, but sometimes hugging will release the flood of tears I've been holding back. But in those cases I needed to cry to feel better, so the hug still leads to happiness.

...

Reply ▾



• [Babydoll86](#) - 12 months ago

Most definately. 'nough said.

...

Reply ▾



• [genver](#) - 1 year ago

Yes it can, simply because it's the best way to let a person know and feel that someone cares.

...

Reply ▾



• [Flippyfish](#) - 1 year ago

I recently went on a school trip to Washington D.C./ Williamsburg. We put up 108 students in a hotel, so of course we had some late night parties. I moved from room to room, chatting and playing cards with my peers. Eventually, i left my shoes in one of the rooms. I forgot which room, but knew the general area. I went in to the wrong room by accident, and ended up in a room full of Asians. One of them, who i was a acquaintance with, but not a very good friend with before the trip, asked for a hug. I'd been depressed throughout the night, despite hilarious madlibs, games of B.S. and making new friends. The hug made my night, and argueably the entire trip some much better. It was just a kind gesture between friends, and i've always said that hugs make everything better.

...

Reply ▾



• [lukelindsley](#) - 1 year ago

in life, its usually always the little things that make us the happiest :)

...

Reply ▾



roxasurban - 1 year ago

Although it also depends on the person as well. I'm speaking mostly from my point of view.

...

Reply ▾



roxasurban - 1 year ago

Well in my opinion when you give too much of something then it starts to not have the same effect when you got it the first time. Say for example, you eat a chocolate chip it tastes good the first time but after a couple of times it starts to give you stomach aches till you don't want anymore. My point is hugs would be amazing from time to time but receiving them everyday would start to not have the really good feeling you had when you first got a hug.

...

Reply ▾



lumo11 - 1 year ago

Absoolutly!

...

Reply ▾



NewspaperCutout - 1 year ago

It really depends.
My past involves being molested quite often. My trust is often non-existent when it comes to males. It took a year to be comfortable enough even to hug a female.
If I'm hugging one of my best friends, I feel secure and happy. If it is a male friend of mine, I feel slightly uncomfortable. If the hug is coming from my boyfriend, it makes everything better.

...

Reply ▾



svdel - 1 year ago

I LOVE hugs. I'm keen to any sort of affection actually. But sometimes a hug communicates things that we wouldn't be able to verbalize otherwise. Sometimes a little physical human contact is all that is needed to make something better. So yes, of course I think that hugs can make us happy :)

...

Reply ▾



alexandracoale - 1 year ago

I think so. Whenever I'm home and either one of my parents hug me, I instantly feel a little better, even if it's temporary.
Also, last night happened to be a very stressful night for me, and my boyfriend came over. We sat on the couch and talked for a while, then he rubbed my shoulders and just held me a little while. Before he left he hugged me for like five minutes straight...even though the problems didn't go away, it certainly felt better to know that someone cares for me that much.

...

Reply ▾



Hurley2113 - 1 year ago

January 21st is National Hug day in the United States and as of the last few years my university has had a collection of students spreading cheer throughout the day hugging those who want a hug. Personally I enjoyed seeing the reaction some people had when they were surprised by a stranger coming up to them and asking if they wanted a hug. I reacted with pleasant surprise and honestly it has made my day every year its been practiced, but this article about the power of hugs makes me wonder, why can't we treat everyday like it's National Hug Day?

...

Reply ▾



RedHeart2U - 1 year ago

hugs Yes, I think so. :-)

...

Reply ▾



Flutterlids - 1 year ago

enjoyed reading the responses.

it makes me think of the people that have exchanged hugs with me, the ones that mean something, the connection that we share only on occasion when we are so far apart.

i am not sure that actually lead to happiness, however, they sure do lift the spirit when shared with someone and a connection is made. :)

...

Reply ▾

[the book](#)

[facebook](#)

[twitter](#)

[tumblr](#)

[youtube](#)

[flickr](#)

[meetups](#)

[vyou](#)

[rss](#)