

At one time or  
another, just about all  
of us have met  
someone who taught  
us to se...

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Often times we think that we know everything that is to know about life. We think that our experiences, no matter how limited, are enough to guide us along life. We feel, in essence, self sufficient. At such a juncture in my life, I met a stranger, only once, who changed my outlook towards life. I met this stranger at a diner. I was just sitting alone at a booth of a diner that I frequented, waiting for my friends to arrive and join me. The diner was filled to capacity, and in walked this tattered looking man. He was tall and thin, and was clad in worn down clothes. As my booth was the only place where there were some empty seats, he started walking towards me. That is when I noticed that he walked with a pronounced limp, though it could have been caused by the state of his torn shoes - he was wearing torn, grimy sneakers. He came and asked if he could perhaps sit for a while at my booth. His voice was very deep and, in a way, authoritative, which seemed very surprising as it did not really fit well with his appearance at all. I told him he could sit there till my friends came, and so he sat down right in front of me. That is when I noticed him closely. His hair, which was quite disheveled, was almost ebony, though it was peppered with some white strands as well. His skin was quite taut, although it did not appear to be too stretched across his face. However, he did have very deep creases at the corners of his eyes, and very deep lines around his mouth. He had piercing blue eyes, which twinkled with mischievousness. After ordering for food, the man sat there for a while just observing the people around him, and then he looked straight at me. We went through the custom of exchanging out names, his name was Jonah, or so he said. Then, upon my surprise, he told me that I gave the impression (at

least to him) of being lost. Upon noticing my surprise, and perhaps even my offense, at his comment, he went on to explain how it seemed as if I did not know what I wanted, and that I was focusing too much on trying to please the crowd. He told me that that trait never did cause any happiness. I noticed that all the while he was saying this, he had a strange intensity about him. He appeared to be a very focused man. His eyes seemed to be not only mischievous, but also having the ability to, in essence, bore into a person's mind. I felt as if he was analyzing me at that moment, which was very disconcerting. Interestingly enough, he did not seem menacing at all, even while his intense gaze was fixed upon me, I did not feel as if he was attacking me or meant to do me some harm. I must admit that looking at his appearance I was averse to take him seriously. I laughed it off at first, and then asked him what he knew about happiness, seeing the state he was in, I commented, it seemed as if he was as far away from happiness as anyone. He did not seem offended or surprised at my comments. In his very calm, patient way of talking, he explained to me how the fact that I had mixed up the ideas of economic abundance with the presence of joy. His manner was very frank, and although I do not have any evidence to back this up, however, I felt as if he was a very truthful man. His honesty seemed to touch a nerve, it seemed. He described how he had spent his life looking for money, because that, he thought, would bring him happiness, when actually it brought him nothing but misery. He had a very interesting way of talking, filled with anecdotes and funny stories, and I was completely immersed in his conversation. He told me that thinking of money and happiness as

separate also meant that we should not blame our sadness on the fact that we have money. Happiness, he told me, came from within. That is when I realized that I did not want anything more than being content from life. For me to be content in this world, I did not have to strive for material gain, but rather look inside myself for happiness. Only when I am happy with myself and my choices can I actually be satisfied with life. The lesson of the stranger has stayed with me since then, and I have benefited immensely from it.