

Well-Being

December Article: One Chance, One Encounter

There is a Japanese proverb that, despite only being 4 characters long, has a profound meaning: 一期一会 (*Ichi-go Ichi-e*). Though often translated as “one time, one meeting,” or “once in a lifetime,” my personal favorite is its literal translation: “one chance, one encounter.”

When I was in 1st grade, a new student was transferred to my homeroom class. We were never seated near each other and were never paired for projects. But one day, near the end of the year, we were selected to tutor some students in the grade below us, and, after a bit of talking, we instantly became friends. Despite this, for the remaining time in primary education, our paths never crossed; we were never assigned the same homeroom teacher, and we had to work to find time with one another before or after class. We even joked that the school must have been plotting against our friendship, since even our lunch periods weren't aligned. Despite all obstacles, we became great friends.

In that moment, I could not possibly have known that I would have but one chance to become close to someone who is now so important to me. And the nature of our meeting showed me — among other things — that so many wonderful things in life arise from flukes, coincidences, and chance encounters. My late grandmother, who traveled all her life, always reminded me before I left for any trip to “not plan everything,” because “some of the most precious memories come from happy accidents.” *Ichi-go Ichi-e* is a reminder of just how true that statement is.

Ichi-go, Ichi-e originated in 16th-century Japanese tea ceremonies: meditative meetings that were vital to the preservation of socio-political alliances and the retaining of leadership. Ceremonies were often scripted and required sparse dialogue and little eye contact. The purpose was not in conversation, but rather in fully treasuring the beauty of a humble, unadorned, and imperfect moment. *Ichi-go Ichi-e* is more than being aware of the transient nature of an encounter; it is a call to sincerely cherish each quiet moment as unique and unrepeatable.

If there's any time of the year that embodies *Ichi-go Ichi-e*, it's the winter season. When relatives and friends gather to spend time with one another — when those we cherish all walk into a moment at the same time — this is *Ichi-go Ichi-e*. Whether it's sharing a laugh with a friend, enjoying a meal with a family member, or even engaging in fleeting interactions with strangers — these arise from the beauty of small, imperfect blinks in time.

So, this holiday season, pause, and deliberately honor this gift which we so often overlook. Find the beauty in stillness and humbleness — in the passing existence of the seemingly mundane. And never forget that some of the most beautiful moments in life arise from the most wondrously unexpected of places.

If you believe you'd enjoy watching films containing elements of Ichi-go Ichi-e, I encourage you to watch any of Hayao Miyazaki's films, particularly: Howl's Moving Castle, Whisper of the Heart, Spirited Away, or My Neighbor Totoro. These films pause in moments, holding the viewer in something that superficially appears mundane, but reveals itself to be truly precious. If you'd like to learn more about mental wellness and resources available to you, visit [Link].