

# The Fall from Graciousness

*Editor's note: This is a special guest op-ed from BernardGoldberg.com Premium Member, Michael G. Frankel.*

It wasn't that long ago when graciousness was expected: at home, at school, in the workplace, and even on athletic fields. Unfortunately, those days are gone, and I fear they'll likely will never return.

One of the hallmarks of graciousness was showing respect to others, even when there was a significant difference of opinion on an important issue. At the end of a heated debate or a hard-fought game, the opponents shook hands to demonstrate that respect. And the winner was typically gracious in his or her victory – no gloating, shaming, or overly exaggerated fist pumps. The loser, likewise, was gracious in defeat – praising the winner and looking forward to the next opportunity to redeem himself or herself.

A winner who did not act graciously was viewed with disdain and sore losers were likewise shamed.

Graciousness began to disappear long before the 2016 presidential election, but the downward societal shift has clearly accelerated during the ensuing three years. Even the most ardent supporter of the president would find it impossible to categorize him as a gracious man. Similarly, those who voted for Hillary Clinton would be hard pressed to call her gracious. Over the past three years, she's been blaming "sexism" and making sundry other excuses for her election loss.

Mr. Trump was not a gracious winner and Mrs. Clinton was not a gracious loser.

They have plenty of company, and it's not just in the political arena. The decline in graciousness reflects and

represents the decline of our society. It also begs the question as to why or how this has occurred and whether the trend may be reversed. There is no clear answer to either of these questions, but there are some societal developments that likely are contributing factors.

When most of us were young, we were taught at home that, “if you don’t have something nice to say, then don’t say anything at all.” When’s the last time you heard someone utter those words, especially in the public square?

Underlying that adage was the notion of graciousness: if you have a negative comment to make that might be hurtful or boorish, keep it to yourself. That, of course, requires some self-control and self-discipline – concepts that seem to have went out the window with the Internet and social media.

Today, the more outlandish and nasty the comment, the more likely it will go “viral” (an interesting term that connotes an infection or illness). Cases in point: recent award ceremonies where celebrities try to outdo one another with their crass and graceless comments and gestures.

Perhaps it is a good sign in terms of future trends that viewership of these shows keeps declining.

A word is also in order regarding the coarseness of language, whether in movies, television, schools, or on the street. When I grew up in the 50s and 60s, there was plenty of cussing but only sparingly was the “F” word used, especially when children or women were present. Today, of course, in our more equal society, there are no limits or boundaries, and so-called “F Bombs” are dropped so often on the street that the intended shock value is pretty much gone. Coarse language can be used to express frustration in the heat of the moment, but nowadays it is used just as much to get snickers, or to show one’s counter-cultural bona fides.

The word “graciousness” is derived from the word “grace.” As

our language is constantly being manipulated to undo commonly understood meanings that have been present for centuries, it's important to remember that "grace" has religious roots. And given the fact that Americans are increasingly straying from religious beliefs and values, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the rise of the secular has contributed to the fall of graciousness. Likewise, as the presence and importance of the American family unit has diminished and become less respected, it makes sense that the lesson of yesteryear to "keep it to yourself" would also be less valued. People coming of age are being inundated with messages, conversations and experiences that more often than not lack graciousness.

Let's hope things change, because at a time when society is intent on reducing each of us to our race, gender, religion, or other groupings, there's a desperate need in our culture for a unifying force that values individuals by how they comport themselves, how they talk and act, and how they treat others.