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Wonderful Words

Someone sent me a link on Facebook this week with some wonderful words from languages other than English – words which the compiler considers would be great additions to the English language - and I suddenly feel I can't live without them.



Looking forward to a family event this week I experienced “voorpret” (Dutch) – “The sense of enjoyment felt before an event takes place” and during the event I definitely felt “mudita” (Sanskrit) – “delight in the happiness of others.” That day I loved “sobresma” (Spanish) “the time after lunch spent sitting over the used plates and glasses talking to the people I had shared lunch with,” and hoped I had “nunchi” (Korean) “the ability to gauge the mood of others, read the atmosphere and react accordingly.”

Our language is a rich and textured one and we have never been slow to adopt words from other languages and incorporate them rapidly into our own. In the writings of Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Tutu I had already come across another word included in the Facebook list - the word “ubuntu” a word from the Nguni language of South Africa meaning “the belief that we are defined by our compassion and kindness to others” and thought what a beautiful word it was and hoped it might edge its way into English.

Nearly every week in this paper we see letters thanking someone for an unexpected kindness, often a stranger who leaves without waiting for thanks. Recently, in church, we heard a reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels unawares.” If we take the word “ubuntu” into our hearts and believe that we are actually defined by treating others with compassion and kindness who knows how many angels may quietly be walking the streets of Petersfield?