

snarky: adjective – describes any language that contains quips or comments containing sarcastic witticisms intended as blunt irony. Usually delivered in a manner that is somewhat abrupt and out of context and intended to stun and amuse. Origin: Snark = snide + remark

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snarky: adjective – irritable or short-tempered; irascible. –□ www.thefreedictionary.com



I come not to praise snarkiness, but to bury it. Well, maybe I don't want to bury it, exactly... just move it out of the main house and into the shed out back. As someone who has reveled in snarkiness for most of her adult life, both her own snarkiness and the snarkiness of others, I suddenly find myself... weary. Depleted. All snarked out. When you embark upon a spiritual journey, sincerely pursuing, for the first time ever, that oft-mocked but all-important Meaning of Life, snark, it turns out, is not the ideal companion. Sarcasm, wit and "blunt irony," however natural those responses, and however safe that harbor, must finally give way to earnest humility if progress is to be made in the human spirit. It is at once a real drag and an indescribable joy.

But this is not another story about my personal pilgrimage. (Group sigh of relief here.) This is about the tenor of our times... about the widespread snarkiness that has invaded our culture like a cancer, threatening to choke the very soul of modern civilization.

Okay, maybe that's an exaggeration. But I do think things are out of hand, y'all.

We don't watch Fox News much at our house, mainly because my husband thinks Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity are not very smart or very nice. I tend to agree with him. So instead, we watch Keith Olbermann on MS-NBC. Keith can out-clever the guys on Fox any night of the week, but he's also twice as mean. Are we really making the nobler viewing selection? I'm not so sure. Olbermann is super-hip and hysterically funny, but more and more, watching him feels like a guilty pleasure... when it feels like a pleasure at all. No one is exempt from his scathing condemnations, and he takes such ruthless delight in skewering his victims. It's almost impossible not to join in the fun, but it never feels quite... right. I appreciate skillful satire, and certainly some folks deserve a good spoofing, but Olbermann takes way too many pot shots. When he directs his contemptuous wit, as he so often does, at his intellectual inferiors, I'm reminded of a little boy gleefully ripping wings off flies.

Speaking of which, Olbermann reportedly featured that YouTube video of poor, thought-challenged Miss South Carolina Teen before it had even made the rounds in cyberspace. And yes, when I first saw that video on my computer, I was just as scornful and superior as the next gal. (Ah, sweet schadenfreude. The blond beauty queen gets her comeuppance!) But no sooner had I fired it off to a few friends than I started to feel sad. And even a little bit *bad*. Here I was, a grown woman with a daughter of my own, getting a cheap laugh at this flustered young girl's expense. Setting myself up as somehow smarter and better, as if I'd never made my own embarrassing gaffes as a teenager... as if I don't still make them, all the time ...

I suddenly realized what I was feeling. It was shame. I was ashamed of myself – ashamed of

being just another voice of derision, just another wise-ass critic, just one more contributor to the Age of Snarkiness.

When the Twin Towers fell, someone famously proclaimed the Death of Irony. Well, Irony wasn't dead; it was merely sleeping. And when it awoke, it was crankier, pettier, and far less refined. It was pure snark. While the Irony of old was rather highbrow and selective, Snarkiness is a populist. Anybody can do snarky, and today, just about everybody does. Primetime cable news shows now feel more like Saturday Night Live; thousands of political websites host millions of ill-mannered, smarty-pants bloggers hurling comments like grenades; TV and talk radio hosts shoot barbs at their guests, who fire back simultaneously – it's a literal barrage of verbiage – till we're saved by the commercial; amateur paparazzi lurk with cell phone cameras at the ready; YouTube's poised to turn the slightest stroke of a comb into a national punch line (John Edwards may have "felt pretty," but he *looked* like a preening ass, bless his heart), and we know way too much about Britney Spears' lingerie wardrobe (or lack thereof). The 24-hour news cycle must be filled, and no story's too irrelevant, too irreverent, or too mortifying. And in case you miss the initial info-feast, there's an endless supply of sassy pundits happy to serve up the leftovers, along with a tasty dash of spin.

It's all just too much, isn't it? We're making a mockery of mockery.

As I watched the "news" coverage of Senator Larry Craig's unfortunate bathroom incident on TV the other night – flipping from channel to channel 'cause everybody had to weigh in, of course – I suddenly felt a sense of deep despair. The pundits had various takes on Craig, none of them particularly charitable. "He's a hypocrite!" "He's a disgusting pervert!" "He's full of self-loathing!" "He's a liar!" One commentator ventured to suggest that maybe, just maybe, Craig was telling the truth. That maybe he had gone into the bathroom... to use the bathroom. That commentator was attacked by the others as if he were roadkill and they, a pack of very snide vultures. It wasn't enough fun just ripping Senator Craig's life and reputation to shreds; the pundits were devouring their own. Now that's entertainment!

I don't know what really happened with Senator Craig, and I don't want to. When I listened to the audiotape (to which I should never have been privy, frankly), what I heard was a distinguished older gentleman, who probably did what he was accused of, but was understandably deeply ashamed, frantically trying to hold onto his dignity while a police officer from a younger, less moralistic generation grilled him relentlessly, attempting to make him confess to something he desperately wished to keep secret. My heart went out to Larry Craig. A hypocrite? Sure, probably so. Whenever one publicly espouses a moral ideal (the much-maligned "family values" in this case), he runs the risk of being branded a hypocrite. We are imperfect beings. We all fall short of our ideals. Here in America, we no longer agree about what those ideals *are*. Everyone seems to concur that Larry Craig deserves our scorn, but we don't agree on *why*. For some, it's because he's a sexual deviant. For others, it's because he's a hypocrite. Still others frown on his failure to be honest with himself and the public.

In a pluralistic society like ours, we may never agree on certain issues of morality. But I do wish we could all agree to temper our snarkiness with a little compassion. An old song keeps running through my head lately, written by the great Burt Bacharach and made famous by his creative muse, Dionne Warwick. *"What the world needs now is love sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of."* I know that sounds hopelessly hippie-dippy – and y'all know I'm no hippie! – but it's actually a sentiment of ancient origin, simple and profound. Even those who roll their eyes at religion and chafe at the very

concept of God have found wisdom and real-world usefulness in the Golden Rule. I think we could all stand to keep it in mind a bit more. That goes for Keith Olbermann, and it definitely goes for me.

The next time I feel snarky – which, believe me, will be any minute now – instead of making that delicious wise crack at someone else's expense, I'm going to take a deep breath, shut my mouth, and try loving my neighbor as myself. It's a pretty low standard – I'm not all that enamored of me most of the time – but it's a start.