



TOUCHSTONES

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Kindness

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

live with a sense that there is something deeply wrong in our society. Many feel our culture has lost track of the reasons one thing is more significant than another. We are fearful and driven to forget the most basic generousities." Nicolaus Mills argues that a culture of meanness has come to characterize many aspects of our nation's social attitudes. He writes, "Meanness today is a state of mind, the product of a culture of spite and cruelty that has had an enormous impact on us." The culture of meanness has been on steroids over the past four years with horrifying impact in America on people of color and immigrants.

which "cruelty targeted the vulnerable" beyond the above: Indian removal, anti-Semitism, McCarthyism, anti-LGBTQ, violence against women, etc. This new and growing meanness is pervasive as it seeks to withstand public scrutiny because it has become "part of our everyday world in ways that we now take for granted."

is style and attitude, meanness without guilt," as evidenced by white supremacists proudly marching in Charlottesville. We see it in growing incivility, both public and private; the demand for a vile "entertainment" offered by radio and cable personalities. And it has been a staple of the 45 president where meanness is a staple amplified by acts of cruelty.

not new. In the 4 century the Christian monk, Evagrius Ponticus, included an-

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Kindness & Deepening Connections

Kindness strengthens and deepens relationships while meanness destroys them. Kindness is a bridge over troubled water, a safe harbor in a storm, a gesture of welcome to a newcomer. Kindness is a balm that can heal the wounds of alienation and isolation. It is a gesture that can put the stranger at ease and disarm an enemy. As one popular saying has it: "Kindness is free. Sprinkle it everywhere." Kindness nurtures deep connections because it is such a generous act. We don't need to question motives, because kindness is always from the heart. As Mother Teresa said, "Kindness has converted more people than zeal, science, or eloquence." Importantly, the purpose of such conversion is to multiply kindness and weave even deeper connections.

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The Noble Ibex, *adapted*

born as an ibex, a magnificent and beautiful wild goat. The tranquil forest in which he lived was far from civilization, but because of its great beauty, hunting parties would at times make a long journey to reach it. On one such occasion, a king and his friends arrived to go hunt-

horseback. The king saw the splendid ibex and dashed away in chase, leaving



the group far behind. When the ibex heard the pounding of hooves, he turned and saw the king with bow drawn with an arrow. Although the ibex could have fought the king's attack, he chose to avoid violence and began running. The ibex came to a familiar, small, deep chasm, and leapt over it effortlessly. When the king's horse approached the same rocky cliff, it stopped abruptly and refused to jump, throwing the king headlong into the chasm.

beats in pursuit. He stopped and looked back to see the rider-less horse at the chasm's edge. He realized what had hap-

(Continued on page 2)

Deepening Connections

Gentle and Wise

(Continued from page 1) **The Noble Ibex**

pened to the king and a sudden welling up of kindness overcame him. Realizing that the king must be injured, the ibex returned to the chasm edge and saw the king far below, moaning and writhing in pain. The former Buddha gently inquired, "I hope your majesty has no serious wounds? Might the pain of your injuries be diminishing by now?"

The king looked up at the ibex in utter astonishment. He felt a dreadful pang of remorse for his behavior towards this noble animal.

"You see, your Excellency," comforted the Ibex, "I am no wild beast to be hunted for sport. I am just a peaceful creature living in this beautiful forest."

"Oh!" blurted the king. "It is I who acted as a beast, not you! Can you ever forgive me?" he asked. "My physical pain right now," continued the king, "is far less than the pain I feel for having threatened a noble creature like you."

Descending into the chasm, the ibex responded, "Sire, I can rescue you if you'll trust me. If you mount me as you would your horse, I will leap out of the chasm with you on my back."

Accepting this kind offer, the king mounted the animal and the ibex leapt in a great arc up to the cliff rim where the king found his waiting horse. The king was so overtaken by the kindness of the ibex that he could not leave. "What can I do to repay you?" asked the king.

"There is one great favor I would ask of you." "Anything," said the king.

"I ask that you give up hunting for sport. A true king," proclaimed the ibex, "will gain his people's love by showing great goodness, not by showing power."

The king returned to his palace, and the ibex disappeared into the shelter of the forest. The king lived by the wise words of the noble ibex, the former Buddha. He forbade hunting and protected his people, but no longer waged war. His kingdom flourished. He was greatly loved and respected by his people as the gentlest and wisest of all kings.

Source: *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents*, collected and adapted by Sarah Conover.

Tender Gravity

Kindness

Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is / you must lose things, feel the future dissolve in a moment like salt in a weakened broth. What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved, all this must go so you know how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of kindness. How you ride and ride thinking the bus will never stop, the passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness / you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho lies dead by the side of the road. You must see how this could be you, how he too was someone who journeyed through the night with plans and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing. You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice / catches the thread of all sorrows and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore, only kindness that ties your shoes and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread, only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of the world to say It is I you have been looking for, and then goes with you everywhere like a shadow or a friend.

Source: *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems* by Naomi Shihab Nye

Rainbows & Puppies

Kindness Includes Everything

George Saunders

...Who, in *your* life, do you remember most fondly, with the most undeniable feelings of warmth? Those who were kindest to you, I bet. ...I'd say, as a goal in life, you could do worse than: *Try to be kinder.*

...Each of us is born with a series of built-in confusions that are probably somehow Darwinian. These are: (1) we're central to the universe (that is, our personal story is the main and most interesting story, the *only* story, really); (2) we're separate from the universe (there's US and them, out there, all that other junk... you know, other people), and (3) we're permanent (death is real, o.k., sure—for you, but not for me).

Now, we don't *really* believe these things – intellectually we know better –but we believe them viscerally, and live by them, and they cause us to prioritize our own needs over the needs of others, even though we really want ...to be less selfish, more aware..., more open, and more loving.

...There *are* ways. ...In your life, there have been High Kindness periods and Low Kindness periods, and you know what inclined you toward the

former and away from the latter. Education is good; ...prayer is good; meditation's good; ...establishing ourselves in some kind of spiritual tradi-

tion—recognizing that ...people before us ...have asked these ... questions and left behind answers for us.

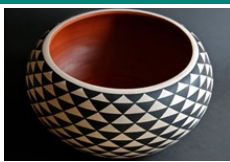
Because kindness, it turns out, is *hard*—it starts out all rainbows and puppy dogs, and expands to include..., well, *everything*.

Source: <http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=1048>



Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." Mother Teresa



Day 2: "Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see." Mark Twain

Day 3: "Our lives are not our own. We are bound to others, past and present, and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future." David Mitchell

Day 4: "Life is just a short walk from the cradle to the grave, and it sure behooves us to be kind to one another along the way." Alice Childress

Day 5: "Kinder than is *necessary*. Because it's not enough to be kind. One should be kinder than needed." R.J. Palacio

Day 6: "Hello babies. Welcome to Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet and crowded. On the outside, babies, you've got a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of, babies—'God damn it, you've got to be kind.'" Kurt Vonnegut

Day 7: "But remember, boy, that a kind act can sometimes be as powerful as a sword." Rick Riordan

Day 8: "All I'm saying is, kindness don't have no boundaries." Kathryn Stockett

Day 9: "People shouldn't have to earn kindness. They should have to earn cruelty." Maggie Stiefvater

Day 10: "Consider it: every person you have ever met, every person will suffer the loss of his friends and family. All are going to lose everything they love in this world. Why would one want to be anything but kind to them in the meantime?" Sam Harris



Day 11: "The best portion of a good man's life: his little, nameless unremembered acts of kindness and love." William Wordsworth

Day 12: "Kindness connects to who you are, while niceness connects to how you want to be seen." David Levithan

Day 13: "Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love." Lao Tzu

Day 14: "You can either practice being right or practice being kind." Anne Lamott

Day 15: "The simplest acts of kindness are by far more powerful than a thousand heads bowing in prayer." Mahatma Gandhi

Day 16: "I would rather make mistakes in kindness and compassion than work miracles in unkindness and hardness." Mother Teresa

Day 17: "You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving. The great acts of love are done by those who are habitually performing small acts of kindness." Victor Hugo

Day 18: "The only way we will survive is by being kind. The only way we can get by in this world is through the help we receive from others. No one can do it alone, no matter how great the machines are." Amy Poehler

Day 19: "What I want is so simple I almost can't say it: elementary kindness." Barbara Kingsolver

Day 20: "The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the greatest intention." Kahlil Gibran

Day 21: "Guard well within yourself that treasure, kindness. Know how to give without hesitation, how to lose without regret, how to acquire without meanness." George Sand

Day 22: "...if anything matters then everything matters. Because you are important, everything you do is important. Every time you forgive, the universe changes; every time you reach out and touch a heart or a life, the world changes; with every kindness and service, seen or

unseen, your purposes are accomplished and nothing will be the same again."

William Paul Young

Day 23: "My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness." Dalai Lama XIV

Day 24: "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." Blanche DuBois/Tennessee Williams

Day 25: "Forget injuries, never forget kindnesses." Confucius



Day 26: "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." Leo Buscaglia

Day 27: "Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution." Kahlil Gibran

Day 28: "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile." Mother Teresa

Day 29: "Love is doing a kindness for someone else, not expecting to receive anything in return." Sylvain Reynard

Day 30: "You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Day 31: "Kind people have a way of working their way inside me and rooting there." Suzanne Collins



Practicing Kindness

Rev. Cynthia A. Frado

Many years ago I read an essay by the Unitarian Universalist minister, Rev. Robert Fulghum, [titled] ...*All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. In that short essay, Fulghum preached a simple and hard lesson. It was his premise that the very same morals, ethics, and manners that we teach our youngest children are the morals, ethics, and manners that we end up needing to practice our whole lives long. Or, as the other, even simpler saying goes "There are three things in life you need to know. Be kind. Be kind. And be kind."

Here is part of Fulghum's essay. "All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sand pile at Sunday school. These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.... Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.... Think what a better world it would be if all the whole world had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had a basic policy to always put thing back where they found them and to clean up their own mess. And it is still true, no matter how old you are—when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together."

This is a great ...reminder about what ...we are called to do in life. But you know and I know that being kind, doing kindness, does not come naturally and is very hard to do on any consistent basis. And so all our lives we must practice—practice loving ourselves, practice loving those who we care deeply about and those who we hardly know and

those who we consider our enemy.

Being kind and practicing kindness is a hallmark of an ethical and religious life.

The Dalai Lama tells us "There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; my philosophy is kindness." ...The Buddha taught "even as a mother protects with her life, her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings: radiating kindness over the entire world spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths; outwards and unbounded, free from hatred and ill-will." (*Metta Sutta*) Cherish all beings? Radiate kindness over the entire world? Outwards, unbounded, free from hatred and ill will? This is a Sunday school les-



son for all ages and it is very hard to put into practice.

...We find this same kind of teaching in the Jewish Scriptures. In the book of *Micah*, the prophet distills the word of God to the following "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (*Micah 6:8*) The Hebrew word for mercy is "*chesed*," which translates to ...doing acts of loving kindness (such as clothing the naked, nursing the sick, comforting those that mourn, burying the dead.) A commentary on this passage notes that we are not only called to be merciful but to love mercy and to do acts of mercy and loving kindness. Micah's ideal is not the minimum of religion, but the maximum. It is what we are called to strive to be and do. This is what we teach our children and what we continue to teach and reinforce in our selves.

...It is hard, very hard, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly. We are ego-bound earthlings, often fearful and self-centered. We find it easier to walk on by, to turn our head away or to run in the other direction when we are faced with suffering. The well-known Gospel story of the *Good Samaritan* is a parable that speaks the truth. Mostly most of us walk by.

Loving kindness takes practice. It takes practice to even be prepared to do what is required of us and that practice can take many forms. There was a bumper sticker a few years ago that said "Practice random acts of kindness." While I know the bumper sticker did not say "randomly practice," this phrase suggests that random acts of kindness can ...instill an ethic of kindness. Now, a few years after seeing this bumper sticker, I wonder how much difference random acts really make. I think about any other skill I want to learn. Would random practicing make me proficient in playing softball? Could I learn to play the piano if I practiced randomly, whenever the spirit moved me?

I really do believe that in the case of loving kindness, practice does not make perfect. The demand to act justly, love kindness, and walk humbly is what we are striving for and most of us will never become perfectly kind. Perhaps because this is such a demanding teaching, I believe that kindness, loving kindness, deserves all the consistent practice that we can give.

A spiritual practice is a practice that we undertake to deepen our minds, our hearts, and our spirits so that we will be able to act in new ways, more of the time. There are many spiritual practices that help us become kinder, more loving, and more courageous people. ...One of the ways that Buddhist practitioners cultivate the way of kindness, is by saying the lovingkindness *metta*. According to ... Sharon Salzberg, *metta* means gentle because it "is likened to a gentle rain that falls upon the earth. The rain does not select and choose, 'I'll rain here, and I'll avoid that place over there.' Rather it simply falls without discrimination." This meditation reaches out ... [and cultivates kindness.] Source: no longer online

Acts of Kindness:

Teaching Children to Care

Marilyn Price-Mitchell, PhD

While kindness might seem pretty straightforward to learn, it's a bit more complex than meets the eye.

...Children are born to be givers. But by 4th grade, ...they are socialized to think more about themselves....

...A research study, *Kindness Counts*, ...from the University of British Columbia and the University of California, Riverside, showed the benefits derived by tweens when they were taught strategies to increase their happiness through acts of kindness.

For thirty days, several hundred 9 to 11-year-old children performed and recorded three acts of kindness each week for anyone they chose. Another several hundred kept weekly track of three pleasant places they visited.

...When kids ...took notice of the pleasant places they visited, their happiness quotient increased.

But those who performed acts of kindness received an extra boost. The study showed they gained an average of 1.5 friends during the month-long period—good support for the idea that “nice guys finish first.” ...This research showed that being kind to other people benefits the giver.

...When children learn to be caring and kind, they also benefit developmentally. ...Being kind makes you feel good about yourself and improves your outlook on life.

Source: <http://www.rootsofaction.com/art-kindness-teaching-children-care/>

Teaching Children Kindness

Rachel Tomlinson

1. Teach your children to name and understand their emotions.

- ♦ By naming their emotional experience, they will be less frustrated or anxious about strong feelings and will cope better with distress.
- ♦ This skill also forms the early ability to empathize. If they understand where emotions come from and how they feel, they will start to be able to identify them in others.

2. Create opportunities to show interest in other people.

- ♦ Ask questions about what people or characters are doing while watching television together or reading a book or sitting in the park people-watching.
- ♦ Can they identify other people's feelings or needs based on what they see?
- ♦ This builds great skills in being able to empathize.

3. Volunteer or arrange ways to give back to your community.

- ♦ Contributing to an appeal, donating old clothes to a local charity, taking old blankets to an animal rescue center are all ways to expand your child's circle of concern beyond your family.
- ♦ Explain to your child why you are donating or caring about others, ask them what it might feel like to be on the receiving end of such kindness and how does it feel to be kind to others.

This really cements the learning and gets them thinking about what it means to be a kind person.

Source: <https://www.firstfiveyears.org.au/child-development/top-tips-for-teaching-children-kindness>

Family Activity:

Kindness Project

First, learn about the benefits of giving for children and adults. *The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation* website (<https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>) has resources and home activities for children of all ages.

Devise an activity where your family records ONE act of kindness a day.

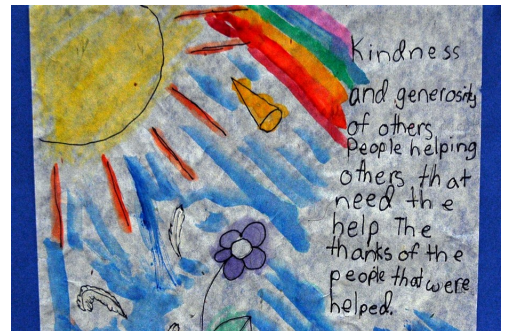
These activities could include helping with dishes, letting someone else go first, taking care of an animal, going out of the way for a friend, hugging someone to make them feel better, etc.

On a weekly basis, take time to share as a family. Share enough so that everyone learns from each other's acts of kindness and begins to understand the types of experiences that illustrate kindness.

The Force of Kindness

Sharon Salzberg

Kindness is compassion in action. It is a way of taking the vital human emotions of empathy or sympathy and channeling those emotions into a real-life confrontation with ruthlessness, abandonment, thoughtlessness, loneliness—all the myriad ways ...we find ourselves suffering or witnessing suffering in others.



...Kindness can seem wimpy, a cop-out, an excuse to do just a little bit to try to make a difference when so very much needs to be done. We might see kindness as the rationale for feeling good after speaking nicely to a homeless person we meet on the street, without having to consider basic injustice and [how] to help that person....

...To explore kindness as that thread of meaning, requires finding out if we can be strong and still be kind, be smart and still be kind, whether we can be profoundly kind to ourselves and at the same time strongly dedicated to kindness for those around us. We have to find the power in kindness, the confidence in kindness, the release in kindness; the type of kindness that transcends belief systems, allegiances, ideologies, cliques, and tribes.

...Kindness ...helps us... “walk our talk” of love, a quality so easy to speak about ...but often so hard to make real. It helps us to genuinely care for one another and for ourselves as well.

...When we really examine kindness, we find it is a deep and abiding understanding of how connected we are. ...I think this spirit underlies ...the Dalai Lama's most famous quotation: “My true religion is kindness.” Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book->

The Unexpected Consequences of Kindness

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

ger as one of eight evil thoughts. In the 6th century, Pope Gregory the Great revised this list to create the seven deadly sins. Meanness was subsumed under the sin of wrath. Beginning in the early 14th century, European artists used the seven deadly sins in their work, which sought to warn against them in Christian culture and consciousness, and oppose them in society.

In Dante's, *The Divine Comedy*, hell is divided into nine concentric circles, with the fifth circle corresponding to the deadly sin of wrath. Understood as meanness, wrath includes feelings of anger and hatred, and acts of violence. While the deadly sin of wrath has traditionally been paired with the virtue of patience, the virtue of kindness is the better and more necessary antidote.

In a sense, acts of kindness are the fundamental expression of goodness. In his book, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Tzvetan Todorov writes, "Once evil is introduced into public view, it spreads easily, whereas goodness is temporary, difficult, rare, and fragile. And yet possible."

In terms of etymology, the circle of kindness is small. The word "kind" has its origin in the Old English word "*gecynde*," meaning an ancestor or offspring. It is expressed in the words kin, kinship, and kindred. Our human and, perhaps, biological tendency has been to extend kindness to our kin, but not necessarily to our neighbor or a stranger, and never to our enemy.

Jesus was radical, in part, because he



sought to extend the circle of kinship and kindness to all people, neighbor, stranger, and enemy alike. He was influenced by his understanding of God, a God of love

rather than a God of wrath and vengeance. The idea, however, of a loving God was lost for centuries as Christianity evolved. Gregory Phillips laments, "The God of Dante is a God whose need for justice outweighs love and mercy," and this portrayal of God in *The Divine Comedy* persists.

Like the golden rule, kindness has been encouraged by world religions. In his first sermon, which was preached in Medford, Massachusetts on October 24, 1802, Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing said, "Perhaps Christ, when on earth, won the hearts of publicans and sinners more by his gentle manners and offices of kindness, when he ate and drank with them, than by exhibiting his miracles." Imagine kindness being more persuasive than miracles.

The Hebrew prophet Micah said that the essence of religion was to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Pearl S. Buck once wrote, "I feel no need for any other faith than my faith in the kindness of human beings." Her faith is reflected in a bumper sticker that reads, "Human-kind. Be both."

At the age of 69, near the end of his life, Aldous Huxley, a scholar of the world's religions and author of the landmark book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, was invited to summarize his research and thought. In response he wrote, "It's a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all of my life and find at the end of it that one has no more to offer by way of advice than this: try to be a little kinder."

It is as Henry James wrote, "Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind; the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind." The unexpected consequences of being kind happens when every act of kindness that you extend to another changes you, transforms you, and blesses you. Eventually, all that is not loving in you, all that is not kind in you, will dissolve so that you will experience the "tender gravity of kindness" and realize that only kindness makes sense.

Kindfulness

The Danger of Fault-Finding

Ajahn Brahm

*"Don't just be mindful,
be kindful."*

We should see the fault-finding mind as a problem, a snake, a danger to be avoided. People sometimes write books with a fault-finding attitude in order to destroy authority, tradition, and institutions.

It's common in the West to think that fault-finding is good—but this is not so. Some years ago, someone visited [the monastery] *Wat Pah Nanachat* for three or four weeks and then wrote a book about his experiences. He really blasted the monastery and Ajahn Chah. He focused on everything he thought was wrong, and consequently the book was completely unfair and unbalanced. People do this sort of thing because, as with

anger, there's a certain pleasure in fault-finding. But be careful, because the



danger far outweighs the pleasure. When you know this, you realize the fault-finding mind is a snake, and you can start to avoid it in the future.

In my experience, as much as 90 percent of any real practice of *kindfulness* is about understanding the fault-finding mind. This includes understanding where it comes from, how to avoid it, and how to develop the positive mind—how to see the nine hundred and ninety-eight good bricks, not just the two bad ones, in a wall you've constructed. Instead of fault-finding, try to understand human beings, yourself included, and have forgiveness and loving-kindness.

Practicing *kindfulness* means seeing yourself as just a person on the path, this poor little being who has suffered a lot already and who doesn't want more suffering. If you can be at peace with your suffering, you'll find that compulsive fault-finding decreases.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28066>

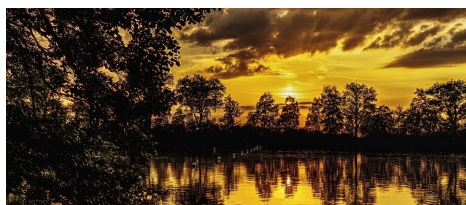
Gracious Eyes

The Blessings of Kindness

John O'Donohue

There is a kindness that dwells deep down in things; it presides everywhere, often in the places we least expect. The world can be harsh and negative, but if we remain generous and patient, kindness inevitably reveals itself. Something deep in the human soul seems to depend on the presence of kindness; something instinctive in us expects it, and once we sense it we are able to trust and open ourselves. Here in Conamara [in western Ireland], the mountains are terse and dark; left to themselves they would make for a brooding atmosphere. However, everywhere around and in between there are lakes. The surface of these lakes takes on the variations of the surrounding light to create subtle diffusions of color. Thus, their presence qualifies the whole landscape with a sense of warmth and imagination. If we did not feel that some ultimate kindness holds sway, we would feel like outsiders confronted on every side by a world toward which we could make no real bridges.

The word *kindness* has a gentle sound that seems to echo the presence of compassionate goodness. When someone is kind to you, you feel understood and seen. There is no judgment or harsh perception directed toward you. Kindness has gracious eyes; it is not small-minded or competitive; it wants nothing back for itself. Kindness strikes a resonance with the depths of your own heart; it also suggests that your vulnerability, though somehow exposed, is not taken advantage of; rather, it has become an occasion for dignity and empathy. Kindness



casts a different light, an evening light that has the depth of color and patience to illuminate what is complex and rich in difference.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17904>

Saving The World

Practice Kindness

Frederick Buechner

When Henry James, of all people, was saying good-bye once to his young nephew Billy, his brother William's son, he said something that the boy never forgot. And of all the labyrinthine and impenetrably subtle things that that most labyrinthine and impenetrable old romancer could have said, what he did say was this: "There are three things that are important in human life. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind."

Be kind because although kindness is not by a long shot the same thing as holiness, kindness is one of the doors that holiness enters the world through, enters us through—not just gently kind, but sometimes fiercely kind.

Be kind enough to yourselves not just to play it safe with your lives for your own sakes, but to spend at least part of your lives like drunken sailors....

Be kind enough to others to listen, beneath all the words they speak, for that usually unspoken hunger for holiness that I believe is part of even the unlikeliest of us because by listening to it and cherishing it maybe we can help bring it to birth both in them and in ourselves.

Be kind to ...[the] nation ...which most of the time [is] ...threatened by the



madness of no enemy without as dangerously as [it is] ...threatened by our own madness within.

...One way or another we are all of us here to give each other our love.... [A] kind moment itself is a door that holiness enters through. May it enter you. May it enter me. To the world's saving.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/15516>

All Kin! All!

Kindness is a Journey

Gunilla Norris

When we accept that our lives are always unfinished and that, even so, they are of immense beauty, we'll be able to live one little step at a time. If that small step is valued for itself, for the tiny, humble adventure that it is, we'll not seek what is beyond us. We'll be glad of the journey and let the destination take care of itself.

Even lives that are full of challenge, despair, and pain have great value and a haunting beauty. We are who we are, because we have undergone the difficulties that somehow belong to us. When kindness resides in us, the world is lit with a soft light. It is no accident that the word kindness begins with the word *kin*.



Under the auspices of kindness, everything is illuminated as somehow kin to us, though we don't know how. There's no way to be outside reality although we often make strangers of ourselves and of others. Day by day, we need only to take our next step into *kinship*.

We already know that everyone is vulnerable, and that change is the way of it all. But when universal kinship is understood, we learn to be careful. How we are with others is really how we are with ourselves. The painful lives of others will mark us, as will the joyful ones. Lessons learned are not for us alone. In the word *yours* is the word *ours*. In these days, kindness matters more than it ever has before. It gives loving permission for a better world to evolve that is not yet visible. ...To live kindness is a journey of immense worth and will continue beyond the span of our lives.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28489>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Kindness

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "In every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious acts of will and unconscious example. Each smallest act of kindness—even just words of hope when they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a smile—reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away. Likewise, each small meanness, each thoughtless expression of hatred, each envious and bitter act." *Dean Koontz*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "I hope you will ... dream dangerously and outrageously, that you'll make something that didn't exist before you made it, that you will be loved and that you will be liked, and that you will have people to love and to like in return. And, most importantly (because I think there should be more kindness and more wisdom in the world right now), that you will ... be wise, and that you will always be kind." *Neil Gaiman*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What has been your experience of receiving kindness from others? What are some examples? How did these experiences influence you?
2. What has been your experience of extending kindness to others? How did it impact the other person? How did it impact you? Was the benefit mutual? Why or why not?
3. What prevents the wider practice of kindness?
4. We are encouraged to "practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty." Do you agree with this invitation? Why or why not? How can we cultivate this attitude in others, especially children?
5. In extending or receiving kindness, how can we work to make this an act of compassion rather than an act of charity in which the giver is assumed to be in a superior position?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Kindship Nonetheless

Renewing Kindship

Mark Nepo

Kindness is the antidote to everything. Just as water soothes fire, kindness calms how we burn each other from time to time. And under all the ways we burn and hurt, there's the soft and lasting presence we were born with, waiting to blossom in the midst of any trouble. For despite the many



ways we try and the many ways we miss, we are kind nonetheless. Inevitably, we're required to step out of the house, afraid as we are of all we might meet. Because it's the kindness and wisdom we will encounter beyond our fear that brings us together, that brings us alive. The trust is that kindness turns fire into light and presence turns misses into surprises. The first reward for kindness is a thoroughness of being. The next reward for kindness is a greater integrity in our relationships. But the most enduring reward for kindness is our experience of Oneness. For being kind renews our kindship with all things."

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28279>

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