Be Kind and Change the World  

By Mabeth Hudson

Kindness has the power to change the world. In a time of cynicism, judgment, finger-pointing, and just plain meanness, change begins within each of us. We can choose kindness that will ripple out and bring goodness into our chaotic world. Do not underestimate the power of kindness.

Defined as warm-heartedness, affection, concern, and care, kindness is an expression of love and compassion. When we are being kind, we shift from a narrow focus of self into a larger world of interconnection and interdependence. Kindness is a form of generosity of heart and spirit.

Eighteenth-century author Samuel Johnson reminds us: “Kindness is in our power, even when fondness is not.” This is an apt reminder that we are not going to like everyone we encounter, but we can still be kind without liking someone. We must find the ability to transcend our negative feelings and emotions and choose the kinder way. It is not easy. Kindness often requires strength, courage, and practice. Thankfully, the Eternal Source of Love and Kindness (that many call God) is ever-present and at work even when we can’t see it.

The science of kindness is quite remarkable. You would think that we would be kind all the time if we realized how kindness contributes to our happiness and health on a personal and communal level. Consider the following:

• According to research by psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky, choosing to be kind and generous makes us happier.
• Helping and showing concern for others releases hormones that impact our brain and heart, making us happier and healthier.
• Kindness is contagious; other people’s kindness makes us kinder.
• Social connections and kindness strengthen our immune system.

While we are certainly called to offer kindness to others, we often overlook the importance of being kind to ourselves. We can be amazingly harsh and critical with ourselves, often unknowingly. Research from Kristen Neff and The Fetzer Institute reveals that each of us has an “inner critic” that criticizes and judges our own limitations, mistakes, failures, and imperfections. As a certified facilitator of the Conscious Aging program, I’ve become acutely aware of the need for self-compassion as we grow older and our bodies break down. Becoming aware of the inner critic and being kinder to ourselves is vital to growing older gracefully. When we are kind to ourselves we can be kind to others.

Please do not confuse kindness with being a doormat. Healthy boundaries are necessary in relationships. For example, sometimes we need to speak the truth in love or separate ourselves from toxic situations and relationships. But, as Pema Chödrön points out: “Honesty without kindness, humor, and goodheartedness can just be plain mean.”

So how can we cultivate kindness in a practical and authentic way? How can we become more kind in the face of challenging people and situations? How can we bring kindness into a harsh world? The good news is that kindness is a muscle that can be exercised and strengthened so that kindness can become a way of life. Here are some practical steps that experts suggest:

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Kindness – Really? … Really!  

BY GREG COCHRAN

May I be honest? Divisiveness, using power for fear, and manipulating language to gain control seems to be the easier path. Then throw in our egos, especially on those days when they are not in a good place – when they are antagonistic, harsh, and nasty – and kindness and altruism dissipate. And, if we would prefer to live a more isolated, narrowed, energy draining, and self-absorbed life, choosing this “easier path” is all the rage.

But if we take away words (because words are too confining at times), how is it that we desire to live? How do we want to be in this world? How do we want to be treated? What type of energy do we want to exude and to absorb as we move toward others and into the world?

We have been created in love by Love – this is part of our DNA … our natural bent and an innate thirst. We have an inherent desire for unity, wholeness, and connection that compels us to yearn for what is down the harder path.

It is this space – the trailhead of the kindness path – that the Well strives to hold as sacred; where we encourage, nurture, and invite the choosing of kindness that leads to spiritual wellness and wholeness. We long to create community so journeyers know they are not alone – all of this done in the context of listening beyond ourselves while providing an environment of inclusion, openness, and a safe place for deeper spiritual exploration. It is that thirst within, if we pay attention, that will lead us to the integration of the spiritual part of who we are into the whole of our living.

In an age of polarization and dualistic mind-sets, the Well seeks to offer an alternative way of being in the world: grounded in listening so that we may hear one another; valuing each other’s personhood and spirit; and encouraging growth toward kindness and peace with self, others, creation and within community. Come join us … we’ll journey together.

Be Kind and Change the World (CONT.)

• Create a sacred pause to respond rather than react. When you face a tough situation that triggers your negative emotions, try pausing before you respond. Take a few deep breaths (this seems simple but takes practice!), and/or reflect through silence, journaling, prayer, or mindfulness.

• Pray for assistance. Ask God to help you be kind, especially when you know that you are facing situations that could trigger negative emotions. When we seek help from the Divine for the greater good, we get assistance in all sorts of ways.

• Try smiling at others even when you don’t feel like it. Try this when you are out in public and you will be amazed at its impact. “A warm smile is the universal language of kindness.” (-William Arthur Ward).

• Set an intention for the day such as, “Today may I be kind and loving to others and myself.” Imagine if everyone set that intention for one day.

• Offer a Loving-Kindness meditation. This traditional Buddhist practice seeks to generate loving-kindness by wishing people well through an ever-widening circle of joy, happiness, and peace. You can find one online or in the resources at the end of this article.

Sources:
At the Heart of Healing and Awakening: Kindness and Honesty!  

BY SARA EISENBERG

Is there anything we want more than to know ourselves and to be comfortable in our own skin? In our own life, how do we become ourselves? How do we remember our wholeness?

Is there anything more difficult than to see ourselves as we are, to see life as it is, to persevere in this exhilarating and terrifying effort?

Most of us have a strong preference, even a habit, of falling back on kindness, or relying on honesty on our healing and awakening journey. But unless we draw on both, we are likely to get bogged down, off track, or lose heart altogether, running from angry ghosts or chasing after angels.

Kindness without honesty leaves us complacent. We let ourselves off the hook, unable or unwilling to see the trail of unhappiness our behaviors leave behind us. We strand ourselves in fantasy.

Honesty without kindness is brutal. We see our faults and limitations, act as judge and jury. We mete out penalties. Or we simply turn ourselves over to a taskmaster whose job it is to bring us up to snuff, into conformity with some idealized version of ourselves. We cut ourselves no slack. All while knowing we wouldn’t treat our friends this way.

The truth of any situation is that we are mixed and mixed up, imperfect human beings.

HONESTY ROOTS US DEEPLY INTO REALITY. KINDNESS WATERS THE ROOTS.

As we take the help of both honesty and kindness, we can cease shrinking away, turn directly into our lives as they are, look directly into the mirror and see the wholeness of our selves. This is the heart of healing and awakening. This is the heart of a life of practice. Let honesty and kindness together guide us on our way.

Sara Eisenberg, MS, is a healer, herbalist and writer. A life-long learner, Sara draws on more than 30 years of questioning, practice, training, and experience as a guide, facilitator and educator in community, academic, and spiritually-based settings. You can find her at her online home, alifeofpractice.com

Editor’s Note  

BY ROBBIN MARCUS

Kindness. It seems like there is so little of it in the greater world right now.

Perhaps this is why the Well has chosen Kindness as our theme for the next several issues of Quench.

What heartens me daily are small acts of kindness – the holding of a door from a stranger, the person who picks up something you drop, the smile or compliment exchanged with someone in passing. These are the things we all can do. These are part of being the change we wish to see in the world.

What small acts of kindness have you benefitted from today? What have you/can you give in return?

Wishing you a kind day,

ROBBIN
OUR MISSION
To encourage and support spiritual wellness in daily life through innovative programs and resources.

CORE VALUES
BRIDGING: Inviting people from different backgrounds and experiences into community while honoring each person's uniqueness.

REFLECTING: Taking time amidst the busyness of life to explore faith, find meaning, and grow into wholeness.

DISCERNING: Helping one another listen for, become open to, and respond to the lived experience of God.

WELLBEING: Tending the spiritual life as an integral part of wholeness in people and communities.

REACHING OUT: Becoming more compassionate, creative, contemplative, and joyful in our relationships and our world.

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