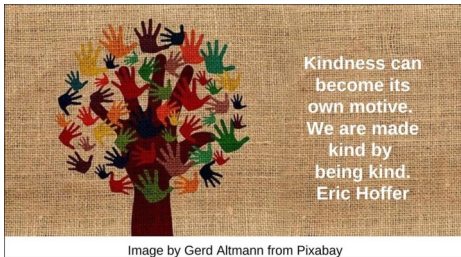




EXPLORATION

Kindness

Readings



1. *Redeemed by Kindness*

by Jack Kornfield

In the Babemba tribe of South Africa, when a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he [or she] is placed in the center of the village, alone and unfettered. All work ceases, and every man, woman and child in the village gathers in a large circle around the accused individual. Then each person in the tribe speaks to the accused, one at a time, each recalling the good things the person in the center of the circle has done in his lifetime. Every incident, every experience that can be recalled with any detail and accuracy, is recounted. All his [or hers] positive attributes, good deeds, strengths, and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length. This tribal ceremony often lasts for several days. At the end, the tribal circle is broken, a joyous celebration takes place, and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/13826>

2. *How to Start a Kindness Revolution*

by Jill Suttie

Kindness. That's a word we don't hear a lot these days. Perhaps it seems antiquated in our competitive, social-media-infused, politically contentious culture—reserved for fools and chumps, not for those who want to get ahead.

But nothing could be further from the truth, according to Tara Cousineau, researcher and author of the ...book *The*

Kindness Cure. In today's world, she argues, we need to cultivate kindness more than ever—not only for the sake of our society, but for our own well-being.

Cousineau points out that we are wired for kindness—that it's part of our biological heritage, designed to help us foster relationships, work together, and survive in groups. When we are kind to others, it releases neurochemicals in our bodies that increase trust and give us a warm feeling.

Research suggests that being kind toward others is associated with better and stronger mental and physical health, relationships, life satisfaction, communities, and even economies, writes Cousineau. Her book points to some of the research behind these claims, but it is mainly a how-to on starting a kindness revolution—and overcoming barriers to kindness.

...It can be hard to be kind, particularly when we're stressed out or emotionally spent. ...Reactive behavior tears at the fabric of our relationships—at the interpersonal, workplace, and even societal level—making it harder to feel good and to accomplish common goals.

...Cousineau suggests [the following]

...

- ◆ Reset your stress...
- ◆ Practice awareness...
- ◆ Use positive conditioning...
- ◆ Create circles of caring and kindness...

...As Cousineau writes, "The kindness cure is not just for you, it's for all of us."

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_start_a_kindness_revolution

3. *The Importance of Kindness*

by Karyn Hall Ph.D.

Kindness is defined as the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. Affection, gentleness, warmth, concern, and care are words that are associ-

ated with kindness. While kindness has a connotation of meaning someone is naive or weak, that is not the case. Being kind often requires courage and strength. Kindness is an interpersonal skill.

You've heard about survival of the fittest and Darwin. Survival of the fittest is usually associated with selfishness, meaning that to survive (a basic instinct) means to look out for yourself. But Darwin, who studied human evolution, actually didn't see mankind as being biologically competitive and self-interested. Darwin believed that we are a profoundly social and caring species. He argued that sympathy and caring for others is instinctual (DiSalvo, *Scientific American*, 2017)

...There are different ways to practice kindness. One way to be kind is to open your eyes and be active when you see people in need. Do you notice when people could use a helping hand? A sense of community is created when people are kind to those who need help.

...Kindness is also about telling the truth in a gentle way when doing so is helpful to the other person. Receiving accurate feedback in a loving and caring way is an important part of a trusted relationship. The courage to give and receive truthful feedback is a key component of growth and flexible thinking.

Kindness includes being kind to yourself. Do you treat yourself kindly? Do you speak gently and kindly to yourself and take good care of yourself?

There are many ways to be kind and many opportunities to practice.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pieces-mind/201712/the-importance-kindness>

4. *Radiating Photons of Goodwill*

by Marc Ian Barasch

Every now and then, I'll meet an escapee, someone who has broken free of self-centeredness and lit out for the territory of compassion. You've met them,

Any eye can threaten, or insult; or in its altered mood, [its] beams of kindness ...can make the heart dance for joy.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Image by Myriams-Fotos from Pixabay

too, those people who seem to emit a steady stream of, for want of a better word, love-vibes. As soon as you come within range, you feel embraced, accepted for who you are. For those of us who suspect that you rarely get something for nothing, such geniality can be discomfiting. Yet it feels so good to be around them. They stand there, radiating photons of goodwill, and despite yourself you beam back, and the world, in a twinkling, changes.

...Thus, it is, say the sages, that the harvest of kindness—of kindredness—is winnowed down to a precious few grains. For at the center of all spiritual traditions is the beacon of a truly radical proposal: Open your heart to everybody. Everybody.

Is this even possible?

Nelson Mandela once remarked that he befriended his jailers, those grim, khaki-clad overseers of his decades of hard labor in a limestone quarry, by “exploiting their good qualities.” Asked if he believed all people were kind at their core, he responded, “There is no doubt whatsoever, provided you are able to arouse their inherent goodness.” If that sounds like wishful thinking, well, he actually did it.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?id=633>

5. *A New Vision of Kindness Starts with Paying Attention*

by Sharon Salzberg

... Kindness [is] associated with meekness, boringness, being forgetful. ...[Further,] many of us are familiar with the commonly held assessment that calling someone “nice” is insulting. It means there aren’t any other notable qualities to point out.

To be fair, being “nice” isn’t really the same thing as being kind. Etymologically, to be “kind” is related to the word “kin”—treating others as we would our own kind, our family, ourselves. In our can-do culture that values competition,

individuality, self-discipline, and other related “virtues,” kindness can definitely seem cute and old-fashioned at best, ineffective and inefficient at worst.

...But kindness is what is missing in so many of our lives, in terms of how we treat and are treated by others, and how we treat ourselves. I have been thinking a lot about kindness as a value that gives us meaning — especially in an era in which communication has become more convenient, and perhaps less mindful as a result.

...We need mindfulness and kindness now more than ever. And the two are related. Paradoxically, many of us feel an increased sense of fragmentation and compartmentalization in our lives given the networked world we are living in. The antidote to these feelings is mindfulness—gathering our dispersed attention again and again.

...Seeing kindness as profound and powerful helps us differentiate kindness and niceness. When someone looks at us with the concern of kindness, we feel seen. There is a sense of connection that is being mutually recognized, and in that we feel our value as humans.

...We don’t have enough models of kindness.... It’s time to change the conversation around kindness, and it starts with paying attention.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/blog/a-new-vision-of-kindness-starts-with-paying-attention/>

6. *Kindness as a Way of Life*

by Stephanie Dowrick

Kindness, as a way of life and living, depends on choices made and remade on a daily basis. Sometimes it will be self-evident and easy. Sometimes it will be an effort. Sometimes it will seem intuitive. Sometimes we will have to silence those self-righteous reasons why we should *not* be kind.

Perhaps we learn most about kindness when we have to think about it, when we are forced by circumstances to leave our comfort zone, question our emotional habits and think hard about the effect of what we are doing or saying. It is particularly powerful when we can be kind for kindness’s sake and because we are free to be kind, rather than because it will make us a hero in other people’s eyes or win us favors.

Many regard kindness as something sweet. It *can* sweeten life, sometimes immeasurably. But in practice and as an ideal, it is far tougher than sweet. Whoever we are, and however much self-awareness we have, to behave and live with kindness challenges our egocentricity and the delusion that we are the center of the universe with needs that should always take precedence over others.

Kindness is learned moment by moment. But it will always carry most weight when we take it up as a fundamental attitude rather than as a series of individual acts: when we see it as cause *and* as effect.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/23973>

7. *A Medicine Called Kindness*

by Robert J. Wicks

On a visit to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, I heard about a cardiopulmonary surgeon who was a legend in the hospital among the patients and staff. He was an excellent surgeon, but that was almost a given in this hospital of fine physicians. What he was known for beyond his technical expertise was his visible kindness.

Although he was very busy — in many cases busier than some of his colleagues — he approached his patients with an aura of “I have all the time in the world for you.” He would come into the patients’ rooms, sit down, stretch out his legs, and inquire after their health. He usually didn’t stay very long, but it felt like he would stay for hours if needed. Patients felt cared for and at ease. He was present to them.

He was the same with the families. You would occasionally see him perched on a windowsill, leaning forward toward a family member with his chin leaning on his hand, listening intently. He saw both the family and the person who had surgery as worthy of the highest attention. He was not only competent; in a word, he was “kind.”

Kindness requires slowing down, paying real attention, and sharing some of yourself with others.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/11754>

Our acts of kindness ... return us once again to the heart of our own humanity.
Will Glennon



Image by Stux from Pixabay

Wisdom Story

Crossing the Finish Line Together

Based on a true story from the 1976 Special Olympics in Seattle, Washington.

Years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants lined up at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the sound of the starting gun, they all started off in their own way, making their best effort to run down the track toward the finish line. That is, except for the one young boy who stumbled soon after his start, tumbled to the ground and began to cry. Two of the other racers, hearing the cries of the boy who fell, slowed down and looked back at him. Then without hesitation, they turned around and began running in the other direction—toward the injured boy.

While the other contestants struggled to make it to the finish line, the two who had turned around to run in the other direction reached for the boy and helped him to his feet. All three of them then linked arms and together they walked to the finish line. By the time the trio reached the end, everyone in the stands was standing and cheering, some with tears rushing down their faces. Even though by turning back and helping the boy who fell, they lost their own chance to win the race, they all had smiles on their faces because they knew they had done the right thing.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/loveconnects/session4/161765.shtml>

Snippets

“Kindness’s original meaning of kinship or sameness has stretched over time to encompass sentiments that today go by a wide variety of names—sympathy, generosity, altruism, benevolence, humanity, compassion, pity, empathy...

The precise meanings of these words vary, but fundamentally they all denote what the Victorians called ‘open-heartedness,’ the sympathetic expansiveness linking self to other.

Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor

“Kindness is the antidote to everything. ...Despite the many ways we try and the many ways we miss, we are kind nonetheless. ...It’s the kindness and wisdom we will encounter beyond our fear that brings us together, that brings us alive. ...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 kinship with all things.” *Mark Nepo*

“If your understanding of the divine made you kinder, more empathetic, and impelled you to express sympathy in concrete acts of loving-kindness, this was good theology. But if your notion of God made you unkind, belligerent, cruel, of self-righteous, or if it led you to kill in God’s name, it was bad theology.” *Karen Armstrong*

“Each smallest act of kindness, reverberates across great distances and spans of time—affecting lives unknown to the one who’s 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 expression of hatred, each act of evil.” *Dean Koontz*

“Human history is not the battle of good struggling to overcome evil. It is a battle fought by a great evil struggling to crush a small kernel of human kindness. But if what is human in human beings has not been destroyed even now, then evil will never conquer.”

Vasily Grossman

“Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel to be tough.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

“The private kindness of one individual towards another; a petty, thoughtless kindness; an unwitnessed kindness. Something we could call senseless kindness. A kindness outside any system of social or religious good.

“But if we think about it, we realize that this private, senseless, incidental kindness is in fact eternal. It is extended to everything living, even to a mouse, even to a bent branch that a man straightens as he walks by.

“Even at the most terrible times, through all the mad acts carried out in the name of Universal Good and the glory of States, times when people were tossed about like branches in the wind, filling ditches and gullies like stones in an avalanche—even then this senseless, pathetic kindness remained scattered throughout life....” *Vasily Grossman*

“So, along with clear seeing, there’s another important element, and that’s kindness. It seems that, without clarity and honesty, we don’t progress. We just stay stuck in the same vicious cycle. But honesty without kindness makes us feel grim and mean, and pretty soon we start looking like we’ve been sucking on lemons. We become so caught up in introspection that we lose any contentment or gratitude we might have had.

Pema Chödrön

“Human kindness lies at the core of peacemaking practice. ...When human connection is ruptured, conflict emerges, and the natural good-heartedness between people freezes or erupts into animosity. To the degree that we—either as parties to the dispute or as third parties—can bring more kindhearted intention into the situation, the possibility of reestablishing human connection is ...enhanced. Peacemakers thus embody the theological truth that all of us are family, therefore all in a necessary web of caring for one another. When the web is torn by painful alienation, much less violence, all of us suffer and long for repair.” *Amy Eilberg*

“Kindness is like a muscle, the more we exercise it the better we are at it.

“Kindness starts as a thought but ends as an action. Acting kindly toward



others is the only real way to let people know we care about them and their happiness. Without action, kindness just lives in our minds but never touches the real world.

“Being kind to others doesn’t have to be complex or fancy. Sometimes the simplest acts of kindness are seen as the most sincere, such as holding the door, helping with directions, saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’ or even just a smile.”

Steven Handel

Questions

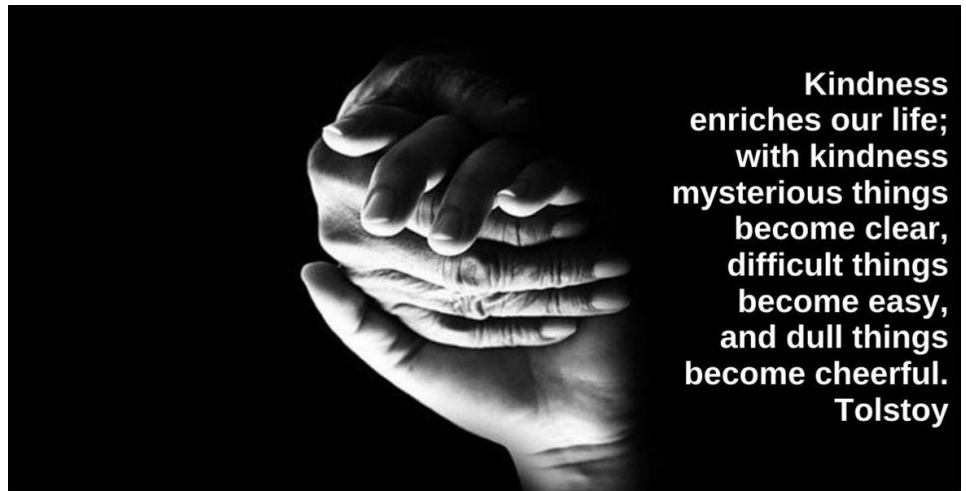
- In reading #1, Jack Kornfield describes a unique restorative justice ritual performed by the Babemba tribe of South Africa when a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly. All tribal members of all ages surround the person and each member speaks to the accused as they share in detail the good things the person has done in his or her lifetime. The ceremony may last days, but when all of the good deeds have been recounted, the circle is broken and the accused is welcomed back into the tribe. The tribe places extreme value on goodness, on kindness, which is how people act most of the time. When there is a transgression, the person is reminded of all the good they have ever done. It is intended to call a person back to their better self. How might things change if we all paid that much attention to goodness and kindness, and immediately censured transgression? How would you feel if others recounted most or all of your kindnesses? How do you/could you attend to the kindness of others? How might that change them and you?
- In reading #2, Jill Suttie challenges us to start a kindness revolution. What are some actions that might support such a revolution? What would be some of the barriers to doing so?
- In reading #3, Karyn Hall refers to “the survival of the fittest.” While this concept is associated with Darwin, it was actually coined by Herbert Spencer in his writings about economics. According to Salvatore Agosta, Darwin wrote about the “survival of the fit,” which only requires the ability to survive and reproduce, not the perfect adaption suggested in the “survival of the fittest.” Further, in the *Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin argued that humans are a profoundly social and caring species, as Hall notes. How might our concept of evolution and competition change if the concept of the “survival of the fittest” is replaced by the “survival of the kindness?”
- In reading #4, Marc Ian Barash questions if it is possible to open your heart to everybody. He then recounts the befriending of his jailers that Nelson Mandela did by “exploiting their good qualities.” Which is the better indication of our capacity for kindness, being kind to the deserving or to those who seem undeserving? Why? How might kindness to the undeserving surface their good qualities?
- In reading #5, Sharon Salzberg suggests that kindness is missing from many lives. Do you agree? Why or why not? She suggests that kindness depends on mindfulness. Why would this be so? She concludes that we do not have enough models of kindness. One model is to see kindness as profound and powerful rather than as meek, ineffective, and inefficient. Who benefits from undermining the value of kindness? How can we resist these efforts?
- In reading #6, Stephanie Dowrick writes, “Perhaps we learn most about kindness when we have to think about it, when we are forced by circumstances to leave our comfort zone, question our emotional habits, and think hard about the effect of what we are doing or saying. It is particularly powerful when we can be kind for kindness’s sake...” What would it mean to “be kind for kindness’s sake,” rather than for our ego or the object of our kindness? Per question #4, what would this approach do to categories like deserving and undeserving?
- In reading #7, Robert Wicks tells of a physician who was quite remarkable because of his kindness. Wicks concludes that, “Kindness requires slowing down, paying real attention, and sharing some of yourself with others.” “Real attention” is the mindfulness that Salzberg emphasizes in #5. What value do you place on kindness? Why? If there was a kindness quotient, how would you rate your level of kindness between 0 and 100? How did you calculate this value? If you wanted to increase your kindness quotient, what would you choose to do? Why?
- In the story, *Crossing the Finish Line*, who really won the race? Why?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

- Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor link kindness to the Victorian concept of “open-heartedness.” How can kindness open a heart? What closes a heart? Who is the most open-hearted person that you know/have known? What characteristics contributed to their “open-heartedness?”
- Mark Nepo contrasts kindness with fear? Do you agree? Why or why not? What else precludes kindness? Why? Nepo lists three fruits of kindness: 1. thoroughness of being; 2. greater integrity in relationships; and 3. the experience of Oneness. Do you agree with his list? Why or why not? Is there something else you would add? Why?
- Karen Armstrong makes the distinction between good theology and bad theology by contrasting being kind with being unkind. Do you agree? What is an example of bad theology? Of good theology?
- Dean Koontz writes about the rip-

ple effects of acts of kindness and acts of meanness. Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?

13. Vasily Grossman asserts that the true nature of the conflict that requires our involvement is between great evil and a small kernel of kindness? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Do you share his sense of optimism that kindness will conquer evil? Why or why not?
14. Do you agree with Franklin Roosevelt that a nation does not have to be cruel to be tough? How should we understand examples when cruelty was/is pursued as “toughness?” How does this ultimately undermine national values?
15. Vasily Grossman writes that even senseless, pathetic, incidental kindness endures eternally, and makes a difference. Do you agree? Why or why not? This suggests that kindness can be intentional or instinctual (i.e., when we are kind without our awareness?) Does this make sense? Why or why not?
16. Pema Chödrön writes that clarity and honesty are significant, but not sufficient. More is needed, and the more is kindness. Do you agree that honesty without kindness can cause us to be both grim and mean? Why might this be true? What other qualities or virtues does kindness enhance?
17. Amy Eilberg concludes that peacemaking depends upon human kindness. Do you agree? Why or why not? Too often, peacemaking is linked to punishment, and ultimately fails. Punishment in place of kindness ensures that your enemy will persist as a constant threat. How does kindness change the equation?
18. Steven Handel concludes that kindness is primarily an act, not a feeling. Kindness as a feeling often dies as a good intention. Do you act on your inclinations toward kindness? If yes, why? If no, why not?



**Kindness
enriches our life;
with kindness
mysterious things
become clear,
difficult things
become easy,
and dull things
become cheerful.
Tolstoy**

Photo by James Chan from Pixabay



**We ask a
heart of
compassion
and
gentle hands
and
kindly words.
Albert Schweitzer**

Photo by Sharon McCutcheon from Pexels



**If you really
want to be
a rebel,
practice
kindness.
Anonymous**

Photo by Sandra Grünewald on Unsplash