



# Kindness

By Wendy Marks  
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"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

I and many others have written or spoken about the difficulties of living in these complex times. I imagine that people always consider the time they live in to be complex. Certainly I would not want to change places with people of another time who, for example, lacked the convenience of running water or electricity. Bucolic 18th-century life loses a great deal of charm when I consider chamber pots and the lack of central heating. But I think that the immediacy and strident tone of today's news doesn't help. We are visually presented with difficult images and situations worldwide. But there is one thing that we can do daily as a small and quiet spiritual practice that will benefit all of us. To practice kindness and compassion.

I have often said that if I were the bumper sticker type I would have the one that says "Mean People Suck." My second choice would be "Visualize Whirled Peas"- but that's another matter. Kindness and compassion are the hallmarks of a functional and responsible civilization. How we treat those with the least is the best measure of our success: "A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones," in the words of the late Nelson Mandela.

Kindness is very important in relationships, be they friendships, families, or partnerships and marriage. In John Gottman's long-term research on relationships and marriage, he found that "kindness (along with emotional stability) is the most important predictor of satisfaction and stability in a marriage. Kindness makes each partner feel cared for, understood, and validated-feel loved" and that "there's a great deal of evidence showing that the more someone receives or witnesses kindness, the more they will be kind themselves, which leads to upward spirals of love and generosity in a relationship."

Or as Ed and Deb Shapiro say in HuffPost: "Random acts of kindness are essential to our wellbeing, as they liberate us from self-obsession, selfishness, and isolation; they are the effect of an open and loving nature. True generosity is giving without expectation, with no need to be repaid in any form. This is the most powerful act of generosity, as it is unconditional, unattached, and free to land wherever it will. Whether we give to our family, friends, or to strangers, it is the same."

But it all starts with self-compassion- how we perceive ourselves and what measurements we use for determining our personal success or failure. Do you measure yourself on how much money you've made? Do you measure yourself on how closely you look like the models in the magazines? Or do you measure yourself, as Maya Angelou says, on how you make others feel? Before you can

make anybody else feel good it is important to have compassion for yourself. Even if you don't have a lot of money or a lot of time you can do something that makes you happy. For me it's often taking half an hour out of my day and reading a bit of a mystery novel. For others it might be taking a walk or a short nap. It seems to me that the culture of achievement, competition and comparison leaves no room for anyone to be the unique person that they can be, and to be as kind to others as they can. So create in your day, every day, an act of compassion for yourself. Make that time sacred. It is not wasted time. If you feel that you love yourself it is much easier to love others.

I recently read an article about the famous Louis Armstrong. When he was a poor youngster on the streets, he was employed by a Jewish family, who always had a bed for him and a place at their table. He recounted the many kindnesses they showed him, including money towards buying his first instrument- a cornet from a pawn shop- providing him with a mode of expression. In fact I have been told that some of his most favorite songs are riffs on traditional liturgical Jewish musical patterns. "They were always warm and kind to me, he said, "which was very noticeable to me-just a kid who could use a little word of kindness." We all know what happened from there. Their compassion and kindness blessed the world with a genius. And he passed it on:

"I came up the hard way, the same as lots of people, but I always help the other fellow if there's anyways possible." Louis Armstrong

Namaste,  
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