

# Kindness

What is kindness?  
Why does kindness lead to happiness?  
Is kindness something we can learn?

Kindness says: “I want you to be happy.” To be kind means to be friendly, caring, generous, benevolent, considerate, respectful, and fair. We all know in our hearts when we have received or offered kindness because of the warm feeling it brings. Being kind invariably feels good, lifts our own spirits, and nourishes us in ways that we don’t always recognize. Everyone benefits.

True kindness does not confine itself to our loved ones and friends but embraces the whole world, recognizing our shared wish for a peaceful and fulfilling life. Nor is kindness solely concerned with ‘doing.’ Anyone who goes about their daily life with kindness in their heart is contributing to the wellspring of happiness in the world.

Kindness is most visible when it involves another living being, but it is equally important that we look inward as well. Instead of being harsh and self-critical, if we learn to be kinder and more compassionate towards ourselves, then it is much easier to share these qualities with others.

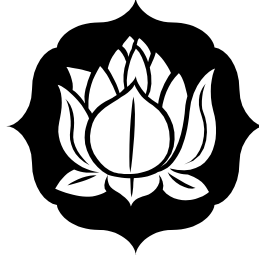
The most effective acts of kindness are backed by the wisdom to understand what will truly be of benefit. Kindness isn’t always soft and gentle. Kindness can challenge us to express a difficult truth, or to campaign for a cause that our friends and family may not agree with. It is not about wanting to be liked. However, an act or word of genuine kindness that comes from a place of wanting to benefit the other person has enormous power to change the world.

An important and yet paradoxical lesson that life has to offer is the discovery that we will find our own happiness through focusing on others. Kindness takes us out of the self-absorption that lies at the root of problems such as loneliness, discontent, and depression. Because we focus on someone else, we are automatically lifted out of ourselves. Kindness becomes an antidote to helplessness and low self-worth. It gives us energy, power and a zest for life.

Kindness does not have to be conducted on a grand scale. We can offer small acts of kindness every day to people and animals. Gradually we can stretch our ability to be kind. It can be particularly satisfying to show kindness to people with whom we have difficulty. It can also be rewarding to expand our circle of kindness to those with whom we appear to have no direct personal connection. At the deepest level we are all human beings and are bound to experience some of the same difficulties and frustrations. It is possible to create a climate of kindness around us that in turn encourages others to be kind.

One way of strengthening our motivation to be kind on a daily basis, as a way of life, is simply to reflect often on the benefits that kindness brings. The Dalai Lama calls this being “wisely selfish.” We see that being kind brings about positive change in our own lives as well as in the lives of the people around us.

[Excerpted and adapted by S. Anderson from: The 16 Guidelines, 2006-2012.]



So with a boundless heart  
Should one cherish all living beings:  
Radiating kindness over the entire world.  
– The Buddha

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy.  
Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness. – Dalai Lama

Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle  
with yourself, you will become gentle with others. – Lama Yeshe

Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in  
giving creates love. – Lao Tzu

A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new  
trees. The greatest work that kindness does to others is that it makes them kind themselves.  
– Amelia Earhart

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

That best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love. – William Wordsworth

You cannot do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late.  
– Ralph Waldo Emerson