

## **Giving and Receiving the Priceless Gift of Kindness**

Are you looking forward to giving and receiving some lovely gifts this festive season? I must confess that I do not enjoy the frenzied buying of gifts that occurs every December. Nowadays, the only gift that I really value is the priceless gift of human kindness.

A few weeks ago, as some of you know, Gloria was admitted to Wythenshawe hospital with an urgent heart problem. Five days later, she was fitted with a stent in her one blocked artery and she is now making an excellent recovery.

What struck me the most, as I accompanied her on this scary journey, was not the incredible skill of the doctors who were looking after her, but the unbelievably kind way in which she was treated by every single member of staff on her ward, including the lady who came to recite the menu choices to her every day.

I soon realised that Wythenshawe hospital has an incredible ethos of patient centred care that is epitomised by endless small acts of kindness from all the staff who work there - well apart that is from one or two non-medical staff in A&E. Having spent another 11 hours stretch in A&E, I now totally believe that purgatory is a real place because I have served time there twice this year!

The good news is that I coped quite well with our interminable wait in A&E by pretending to be Mary Poppins and doing what I could to support one or two really frail, but lovely elderly people who were waiting hour after hour to be seen. I then had an amazing realisation.

At first, I thought that I was the one being the helpful one in A&E as, for example, I got 90 years old Donald a cup of tea from the fiendishly complicated vending machine, and later, put my arms around an extremely unwell elderly lady who had burst into tears. But then it dawned on me that those who accepted my help were angels in disguise. They were assisting me just as much – if not far more – than I was helping them. They were so lovely that talking to them really took my mind off my growing agitation and anxiety about Gloria's health.

My deep realisation that those who warmly accept a kind act are benefitting others just as much as those who are offering help knocked on the head any idea I might have briefly entertained that I was kinder than those needing my help. It also reinforced a statement from *A Course in Miracles* that giving and receiving are basically the same.

I can now see clearly that giving and receiving are two sides of the *same* coin. In fact, we are all constantly both giving and receiving in an endless exchange of energy that flows in circles whenever individuals meet or even think about each other. This flow of energy is neutral, but when a small act of loving kindness is lovingly performed and gratefully received, that flow of energy is imbued with the incredibly positive, life-enhancing qualities of love and light.

So this month, I want to encourage you to welcome others showering you with kindness. A lot of wonderfully kind, loving people I know are so good at performing selfless acts of kindness for others, but not nearly so good at graciously accepting kind help from dear friends or even from strangers. But please contemplate on this for a moment or two. Just as it takes two to tango, so it takes at least two for any life affirming act of kindness to occur in our world. If no one is open to receive kindness, then of course, no one is able to give kindness to others.

Performing small acts of kindness for others is a wonderful way to feel as though our life has some real purpose and to experience the true joy of connecting in love to another sentient being. Moreover, there are definitely times in our life when it is highly appropriate to give priority to acting kindly and lovingly toward another sentient being – such as all those long years that a mother has to selflessly shower their child with loving, kind acts of nurturing and support.

However, there are also times in our life when it is highly appropriate and desirable to let others shower us with acts of kindness. Indeed, as we get older, and at times maybe frailer, we probably need to accept that it has become our turn to be more often the receiver rather than the giver in a continuous game of ‘pass the parcel of loving kindness’.

So this festive season, as well as doing your best to give others a wonderful time, please, please graciously accept all the acts of kindness that others long to perform for you. Keep reminding yourself that giving and receiving are the same.

Cut through any reluctance to receive others' help by remembering that if you refuse to accept kind offers of help and support, you are actually depriving someone of the immense joy that comes from opening our compassionate heart and reaching out to assist someone in need of a little TLC.

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