

The Power of Kindness

You can never know the ripple effect you create with one tiny gesture of kindness. (Elle Sommer)

If you have been watching or listening to the news since Russia invaded Ukraine on 22nd February, you probably despair about man's inhumanity to man. We know so many grim details about wars these days as they unfold on our screens day after day. We can also watch re-enactments of murders committed by serial killers or read sickening reports of terrible sexual abuse cases. We are now almost too well-informed about all the endless horrors of our modern world and not nearly knowledgeable enough about the power of kindness in the midst of so much cruelty and chaos.

However, if you go beyond the horrific headlines, you can find many examples of human kindness. For example, this morning, I was flicking through short videos on You Tube and came across one which showed a group of men in India rescuing a very young and very small elephant that was trapped at the bottom of a deep ditch. Someone operating a digger *very* carefully and skilfully scooped earth down into the ditch until after an agonising few minutes, the baby elephant was able to scramble to freedom and re-join its herd. I have to confess, the whole true story brought tears to my eyes.

Watching this really touching video reminded me of a line from A Course in Miracles, lesson 67, Love created me like itself. That line was:

Kindness created me kind.

A Course in Miracles insists that each and every one of us is created unconditionally and limitlessly kind. Now of course, we know that in this world, many, many human beings, including some shockingly young children, sometimes act in horribly cruel and destructive ways. Indeed, some crimes perpetrated by humans are so horrific that we tend to say, 'They were born evil!' But researchers have found that children who inflict cruelty on others have usually experienced some extreme type of cruelty or indifference from their own care-givers.

So let us stick with the premise that humans are by nature pretty kind creatures. Apart from any deep, spiritual ideas about human kindness, modern scientists would claim that an innate tendency to be kind is there to assist the human species to co-operate with one another in order to bring up the future generation successfully and thus ensure the survival of our species.

Now all of this evidence that we have an inbuilt need or tendency to be kind to one another has led me to ponder whether focussing on loving kindness might be one way in which we can all do something useful for ourselves and others during this terrible time of war.

Modern research has shown that being kind causes your body to release a variety of natural feel good chemicals that have all sorts of beneficial effects on your longer term health and well-being. But I believe that being kind can also go at least some way to counterbalance all the violence and cruelty in this world.

So - and here we get to the crux of this month's message – I think we should all experiment with focussing on small acts of kindness this March and then closely monitor our mood to see if there is a correlation between being kind and being happy or being more at peace in the midst of so much conflict and fear.

Our acts of kindness this month really do not have to be a big deal. Maybe we could simply commit to smiling more often to a passing stranger, buying a hot drink occasionally for someone living on the streets, or ringing someone we know to be a little isolated or lonely this month to ask them how they are doing.

The other great way to focus on human kindness this month is to notice how often other human beings perform small acts of kindness. Just set your intention to keep looking out for others being kind and I am sure you will see more and more small acts of kindness all around you.

The really good news about performing small acts of kindness on a regular basis is that it takes very little effort and yet it can have a big ripple effect. There is evidence that if someone is the recipient of a kind act, they often 'pass it on'. There are even some videos on You Tube showing how this works, although for all I know, they are purely fictional.

Even when we are feeling low or scared, focussing on being kind to another sentient being can be a wonderful antidote to our tendency to be pretty self-centred when things are not going our way.

I recently read a wonderful article entitled Preparing for Surgery by William Bloom. William wrote about how scared he had been waiting to have a major operation under general anaesthesia. At first, he focussed on visualising the perfect outcome of his surgery in terms of his own health. But then he realised that this approach was really quite self-centred and fear based. So he changed his focus and began to pray, *'Whatever happens to me, may my presence and the whole process be a blessing for everyone involved.'*

Now we certainly do not have to wait until we are about to have surgery to adopt this approach to any forthcoming event in our life. We could just as well say this lovely prayer before a wedding, a funeral, a holiday, or even a visit to the dentist.

All we have to do as we set off for any meeting with other human beings is to pause to set our intention to be as kind as we possibly can to ourselves and others. We can then silently pray that the benefits of our kind intentions will ripple outwards into the world and maybe even set off a chain reaction of loving kindness that will benefit huge numbers of human beings that we will never know.

Maybe we could even visualise waves of unconditional loving kindness spreading all across the world as we imagine all nations living together in perfect peace and harmony.

Imagine there's no countries.

It isn't hard to do.

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace.

You may say I'm a dreamer,

But I'm not the only one.

Imagine someday you'll join us,

And the world will be at one.

John Lennon

Peggy Foster

March 2022