

Acts of Kindness
By Diane DeMarco
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When I was in graduate school, 1981, I met Kathy, a middle aged school teacher who had always wanted to be a psychotherapist. She was by far the smartest person in the class, a lot older than I at the time and I really thought she was amazingly insightful and gifted. One day, we went to coffee and she surprised me with this story.

“I knew I could never afford to go back to school as I was a single parent coming from poor background. I needed all my money as I wanted to put my 3 kids through school on a schoolteacher’s salary. But I had always had such passion for psychology, and understanding people. My friends would come to me for help, my family would ask me for advice and I helped them understand their relationships. I just had this insight. I don’t know where it came from. Two years ago, in the mail, came a check that covered the tuition of the two years MFT Program. It came with a note. “This is a gift to you **for** your Master’s Program. The only requirement attached to it is that you do not pursue who sent it or where it came from.” I was flabbergasted. There were actually people in the world who did that sort of thing? Wow. That’s when I first really thought about acts of kindness.

‘Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty’, is a phrase coined by peace activist Anne Herbert. Herbert says she wrote it on a placemat at a Sausalito restaurant in 1982. Acts of kindness are thoughts, words and actions that put loving energy into our immediate environment. They are energy, chi, positive life force. It’s a wonderful way to reach across time and space to touch the life of another being.

From the book Random Acts of Kindness, by Dawna Markova “Random acts of kindness are those sweet or lovely things we do for no reason except that, momentarily, the best of our humanity has sprung into full bloom. When you spontaneously give a stranger the bouquet of red carnations you had meant to take home to your own dinner table, when you give your lunch to the guitar-playing homeless person who makes music at the corner, when you anonymously put coins in someone else's parking meter because you see the red "EXPIRED" medallion signaling to the meter maid -you are doing not what life requires of you, but what the best of your human soul invites you to do.”

Acts of kindness are relatively easy. An intention is formed and you carry it out whether it be spontaneous or planned in advance. And if the other person passes on the kindness, it can multiply exponentially. Acts of kindness can be found in every part of the world and every part of human history. One case in point comes from the actions of Sir Nicholas Winton, in 1938, an ordinary, fun-

loving London stockbroker. But when he heard stories from friends in Prague of Jews losing their jobs and homes under Nazi occupation, Winton decided to do something. Fearing that worse was to come, Winton decided to save as many Czech children as he could. He masterminded the incredible escape of 669 children of refugees. Winton raised money, begged the British government to grant visas, chartered the trains, forged papers, and found families in England to adopt the children. He never told anyone that he did this, including his wife. By accident, in 1988, his wife found a scrapbook full of pictures of the children and letters from their parents in their attic.

Eric Hoffer said “We are made kind by being kind.”

The higher form of gift giving is to give anonymously. Marshall Rosenberg said about anonymous acts of kindness: “The receiver enjoys the gift without worrying about the consequences that accompany gifts given out of fear, guilt, shame, or desire for gain. The giver benefits from the enhanced self-esteem that results when we see our efforts contributing to someone’s well being.”

Paradoxically, it can also be true that knowing who is giving you a gift of kindness can be the most heartfelt part of the transition!” So, you’ll need to make the call if you want to be known as the giver or not. You’ll either attach your name or you won’t. Either way you most likely will have a feeling of elation, followed by a period of calm.

The Dalai Lama said “My Religion is simple. My religion is kindness”

Allan Luks and Peggy Payne have identified some of the physical effects of kindness in their publication "The Healing Power of Doing Good". Luks calls this the “helper’s high and it involves physical sensations that strongly indicate a sharp reduction in stress and the release of the body’s natural painkillers, the endorphins. “This initial rush” he says is then followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional well-being.”

These effects can include a greater sense of calmness and relaxation, which may also ease pain (from headaches to back pain) and may even reduce high blood pressure. They also suggest that other effects of kindness may increase your energy level and can even reduce excessive stomach acid.

Theodore Rubin

Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom.

Acts of kindness are often rewarded with the gift of well-being but other results can also take place. Take my friend Harmony who told me a story about her parents once. “My folks took care of their elderly, feeble neighbors who had no family and unable to fend for themselves for a number of years. My Mom drove them to the doctors and made extra food daily and brought it over to them. My Dad did repairs on their house and one year painted the outside. They died within a very short time of each other and a little while later my parents were shocked to find they were the inheritors of a couple million dollars. As it turned out, the neighbors were wealthy. They had been saving money over their lifetime and just didn’t get around to spending it. Who knew?”

Small, unobtrusive acts of kindness are profound in and of themselves. My friend recently related this story to me: “Once, many years ago, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer and was scheduled for a mastectomy. That morning I attended a college class in which the husband of a good friend was also a student. Most mornings we said hello to one another and that was about it - he would sit with his guy friends, and I usually sat alone. When he entered class that morning, he came and sat next to me. He never mentioned my mom, never talked about the situation at all...he just sat next to me and chatted a bit. That was the day I learned that sometimes the kindest act is just to BE there...and I always remember this as one of the most touching acts of kindness I've ever received.”

There was an anonymous woman that has been doing random acts of kindness around Pittsburgh but has recently revealed her identity."Secret Agent L," as she refers to herself on her personal blog, has come forth to reveal her identity as Laura Miller. Miller gives people things like gift cards and flowers, and said she has 80 other people working for her around the globe, as far away as Denmark, Spain, the United Kingdom and Australia. Her blog shows that she has been brightening people's days by leaving small gifts behind at random places to make perfect strangers smile. Her gifts are typically worth \$5 or less, like a gift of quarters left at a Laundromat, an inspirational magnet or gift cards. "I want them to feel in the present, be aware of this life they've been given which is such a gift, and if I can be the person to let them know there is so much in this world that is good and they are good, that makes my day," Miller said.

Most of us don’t consider that acts of kindness can also be given to the self. My Aunt Irene has a saying that I have heard whenever we went shopping together... “Who deserves this more than I do?” She also had the money to go along with that saying! But rewarding ourselves once in a while with something special is an act of love.

There is another type of gift you can give yourself and it cost nothing!

“Take nothing personally as an act of kindness to yourself.”

Can you imagine never feeling hurt anymore? Or Slighted? Or Put down? Judged? Or Criticized? This is what the Buddha concept of detachment is about. Take nothing personally. This is also the 2nd Agreement in Don Miguel Ruiz’s book **The Four Agreements**, a Practical Guide to Personal Freedom. Most of what we react to in the world as unkind is often just a conjecture (or projection) from our own mind that all too often criticizes ourselves.

Another act of kindness you can give yourself is the gift of receiving acts of kindness from others. So, you have just been told that you look great or you’ve been missed. Do you ignore the compliment? Sluff it off. Negate it? The mark of resiliency is in supporting your own being and operating from your strengths. To know your true worth, you need to acknowledge your own strengths, abilities and friend’s appreciations. To graciously receive the compliment, breathe it in. Don’t throw it away or act as if it wasn’t even said. Look at the person who has given you this great opportunity to practice and say “Thank you.” Or “That really makes my day.”

Before I go on, I need to say that I know that I’m preaching to the choir. UU’s are some of the most generous, loving and kind people in the world. The people of this congregation are no exception. So, I decided to choose one exceptional role model for our congregation to acknowledge today. I wish I had the time to celebrate each and every one of you. However, for now, I would like to call up Valerie to tell us about this person.

*Ribbon

As hard as it is to believe, there is something splendid going on in this country? Did you know that we have some exceptionally giving people who are wealthy? It started with a dinner, envisioned by Warren Buffett, organized by Bill and Melinda Gates, and hosted by David Rockefeller. It took place at the elegant and discreet President's House at Rockefeller University in New York on May 5 of last year. It was only recently that the impressive fruits of that dinner were unveiled, as 40 billionaires – worth a combined \$230 billion (£145 billion) – signed a "giving pledge" to donate at least 50 per cent of their wealth to good causes. It is a remarkable act of (NO BLESS EH BLEEZH) *noblesse oblige*, rich people behaving in an honorable and generous way to those less privileged!

At the original meeting, as they sat around a large conference table, everyone was asked to talk in turn about what philanthropy meant to them. Most said they enjoyed giving money away more than actually making it. At the Manhattan dinner, Mr Buffett praised a Wall Street investment banker's wife for coming up with the best idea he had heard – sit down, work out how much one's children needed and decide what to do with the rest. The Gateses are now hosting dinners in London, India and China.

Is there a down side to an act of kindness? According to *The Week*, a magazine that reviews the best of the US and international media dated September 2010, "You'd think that people who are relentlessly altruistic and demonstrate unselfish generosity at all times would impress their fellow human beings. But a new Washington State university study showed that do-gooders are often regarded with suspicion and resentment....and seen as deviant rule breakers." This gives me pause to wonder, but not for very long. I figure if you are unappreciated or suspected of ulterior motives, you can practice acting from your own values without reaction to accusations or the outcome. Remember, *Take nothing personally?*

Recently I challenged people in my meditation group to implement an act of kindness, not yet tried and report back what had happened.... One couple decided to take me up on it. She and her husband went to a local intersection with a stop sign. He waited in the car across the street while she went out to the sidewalk corner in anticipation of someone who looked like he/or she might need assistance crossing the street, an elderly lady? A tourist with lots of shopping bags?. She said waited a long time but no one seemed to be of need. Finally, over an hour later, she was tired and decided to return to the car. She felt a bit disappointed. As she was about to cross the street, she heard a young man call to her. "Can I help you across the street?" She said "Yes" of course! She said that she and her husband laughed all the way home.

The Paradoxical Commandments by Dr. Ken M. Keith (1968) gives us an understanding of what it means to live by our values, never in reaction to others. (Mother Theresa later made this famous)

1. People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

3. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.
Fight for the underdog anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Built anyway.
9. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway....
10. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.

Here's one example of how kindness can work and perhaps I never would have known it had it not been for the internet.

One Million Acts of Kindness Tour on Ashland University Campus

Bob Votruba and his One Million Acts of Kindness Tour will be in Ashland and on the Ashland University campus. He and his dog, Bogart, will be roaming the campus, talking to students, handing out literature and preaching about kindness.

In addition, Votruba will speak on "The Power of a Kind Community." The goal of the tour, according to Votruba, is to encourage individuals to perform a million acts of kindness during their lifetime. This requires making a commitment to having a kindness mindset.

I have a handout which you'll find on the table that suggests some 77 acts of kindness ideas. Someone give me a number between 1 and 77 and I'll read you that suggestion.

So, here is my challenge. If you want new ideas, help yourself to a handout at the break. If you would like to participate in our act of kindness practice, take an envelope and be willing to share your experience so we can all share our kinder and more loving moments in a future service. But you can't open it until the service is over. (Pass out the envelopes).

Allowing a spirit of kindness to permeate our lives would be a quantum leap, from an evolutionary standpoint. Eliminating meanness, pettiness, gossip, criticism, judgment, polarity, and blame would be a superb act of kindness to others but even more so, to yourself! It is a fundamental step along any spiritual path. We can do more. Much more. We can resolve to be kinder, gentler beings. All day, every day. We can find ways of giving that enhance our own health, help other human beings feel good, generate positive energy and create a world in which kindness is never a random act, but rather a way of life.

Thank you.

Choose any of the following and write or tell your experience to me. You may want to plan it or do it spontaneously.

- a. Spend \$20.00 or less on one or more acts of kindness that is different for you. See if it reverberates or note the response. Write about the experience.
- b. Incorporate a new act of kindness into your life without spending any money. Write about it.
- c. Notice acts of kindness that are given to you and practice receiving them gracefully. Write about them.
- d. Make an act of kindness to yourself, one out of the ordinary. Write about it.