

Kindness

I think I'm getting older! Young people totally BUG me! They talk loudly on their cell phones on trains interrupting my peaceful thinking, reading or quiet conversation. *Don't* they know how to be respectful of other's auditory space?? They do the same in restaurants. Indeed they are LOUD in restaurants oblivious to anyone else trying to have a conversation around them. I confronted a young man on this recently and he told me very aggressively he wasn't doing a thing wrong and I could leave if I didn't like it. I was there first anyway. It totally infuriated me!

Young people hog the road. When lanes merge, look out, they *won't* get let in! Afterall, they not only *deserve* their spot on the road, they *fought* for it! Young people bump into one without apology, don't move over on the sidewalk for old ladies, pollute the atmosphere with their boing boing music whether you like it or not, think their obnoxious kids are cute and don't care if they are loud and rude, hardly discipline them. Then those very young people turn around and think they are so clever in the work place because they're faster on computers than you are!

Yep, I'm getting older!

And what, pray tell, does my whinging have to do with the topic of kindness? Well, exactly, it's showing how it feels to be on the receiving end of lack of kindness. And what, pray tell can I do about this situation? Nothing! Or can I?

People usually behave as they are taught to behave. I guess young people today have been taught that they can do as they like, please themselves, and aren't taught to consider others in their choices. Should went out the window and took want to with it! They are taught they are smarter, cleverer and deserve all they get. They also know they have to fight for their progress in life. Life today isn't easy. Kindness is lost in the daily bump and grind of life. Oh what a pity!

What does this mean to me? Well I can go on complaining about it, and yes, I'm afraid I am easily tempted to do so. However I can also be: a model of courtesy and kindness, and also reach out to others with kindness.

I was lucky enough to hear Marisol Caballero speak at Neighborhood Church in Pasadena speak on 18/7/10. In her wonderful talk on the 7 virtues she said:

The seventh virtue, (respect for the interdependent Web of Life) which Paul says is the greatest, is Charity- also known as caritas, in Latin, or agape, in Greek. This virtue, said to be the equivalent of love, is the counterpart of Greed. Through charity we learn generosity of our time, talent, and treasure. We make sacrifices for the benefit of others. We call our Unitarian Universalist campaign against oppression "Standing on the Side of Love," with this in mind. With this love we maintain temperance, gain wisdom, work for justice, keep courage, have faith, give hope, and exemplify generosity.

Basically kindness is the daily expression of this sort of charity that Marisol spoke about.

Kindness is sometimes easy, sometimes hard. Using simple manners can be construed as kindness. That takes a certain amount of discipline, to be sure, but it's possible for most adults.

Kindness sometimes means using a little more breath and observation to those around us. Offering a helping hand with a heavy package to a person struggling with it isn't hard, it just takes observation, effort, and making the time. Likewise easy to do is allowing people to merge in front of you on the road, not occasionally but usually. Being available to really actively listen to others, even those we don't know well, takes more effort and more time. Pitching in, showing initiative in helping others takes more effort again: making a casserole for someone who is sick or has a new baby, offering a weekly lift to the super market to an elderly neighbour, helping someone move or pack, taking a child out to give a mother a break. None of this is hard, but it takes time, effort and observation to find the moment to perform an act of kindness.

Kindness in all we do, in our interactions with other humans, is what we can ALL perform. It doesn't take talent, massive education, or other skills. It just takes wanting to and making the time and effort. One doesn't always receive kindness in return either. One has to expect that.

It is the making the effort in itself that truly is the reward. It is that which changes *us*.

Of course I don't mean lie down and let people walk all over you, use you, drain you. That's allowing exploitation of yourselves. That's not being kind to yourselves! Being kind to yourself means doing what you can, not what is unrealistic or silly or exaggerated so as to be a drain on your mental and physical resources.

People are also so unkind to themselves in their heads. In ourselves we have this inner critical voice, at least most of us do. Sometimes being kind to yourself means turning that voice off! That sometimes take *enormous* effort, even counseling in how to do so. Settling for doing the best you can at the moment is being kind to yourself. Giving yourself time for rest, recreation, and regeneration is being kind to yourself. It's all "good".

I think if we all make the effort to make simple human kindness foremost in our daily outlook, in how we execute our daily live, we change. We look for the good, and chip away at life's little difficulties. When John F Kennedy said, "ask what you can do for your country, not what your country can do for you," we could also change that to say "ask how can I be kind today, not how I expect others to be kind to me!"

On the other hand, kindness is a two way street. Though we can't demand it, we can appreciate it genuinely when it comes our way. We can accept it gracefully. Sometimes we get so wrapped up into being so self-sufficient and strong, we are almost afraid to accept a kindness freely given. When we do that we are denying ourselves the gift of receiving kindness, and the other person the gift of giving kindness. It becomes selfish and fear driven.

I remember when I taught 3rd grade. Sometimes I spelled words wrong, not knowing the Aussie spelling for words or just making a genuine error. Other times I'd make an error in discipline. I soon learned to admit my errors of judgment, and to ask the kids forgive me. They always did too! They learned two things by this: 1. They can forgive, and 2. When you make an error you can be forgiven and it isn't the end of the world. We all make mistakes and that's okay. Forgiveness is such an integral part of kindness. There is no point in helping ones neighbor

with her groceries when we ignore another who said something to annoy us 30 years ago! We need to deal with our issues, not play passive aggressive.

I think no matter how smart we are, no matter how hard we work on social or environmental or political causes, no matter how we are tolerant of different religions or beliefs, that as Unitarian Universalists we can't live our principles without truly incorporating kindness into our every day life. Kindness shows a deep respect for the dignity of others, for equality of all, for justice, compassion in human relations, and for the interdependent web of all life. Kindness makes us the better people we are called to be. Giving and receiving kindness isn't hard, but it takes effort and open eyes.

I'll finish with a Reading by Rebecca Ann Parker

Your gifts, whatever you discover them to be, can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power, the strength of the hands, the reaches of the heart, the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting.

Any of these can serve to feed the hungry, bind up wounds, welcome the stranger, praise what is sacred, do the work of justice or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door, hoard bread, abandon the poor, obscure what is holy, comply with injustice, or withhold love.

You must answer this question: what will you do with your gifts?
Choose to bless the world.

The choice to bless the world is more than an act of will a moving forward into the world with the intention to do good.

It is an act of recognition, a confession of surprise, a grateful acknowledgement that in the midst of a broken world, unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide.

There is an embrace of kindness, that encompasses all life, even yours.

And while there is injustice, anesthetization, or evil, there moves a holy disturbance, a benevolent rage, a revolutionary love

Protesting, urging, insisting that which is sacred will not be defiled.

Those who bless the world live their life as a gesture of thanks for this beauty and this rage.

The choice to bless the world can take you into solitude to search the sources of power and grace;
Native wisdom, healing, and liberation.
More, the choice will draw you into community,
The endeavor shared, the heritage passed on, the companionship of struggle,
The importance of keeping faith,
The life of ritual and praise,
The comfort of human friendship,
The company of the earth its chorus of life welcoming you.
None of us alone can save the world.
Together- that is another possibility, waiting.

I thank Marisol Caballero, (Neighborhood Church 18/7/10) for this quotation as well.

Blessed be kindness.