



RedeFining Kindness

How does our own personal definition of kindness affect our thoughts, translate into our actions and create our own life experiences?

When I discovered the theme for this month's Connect Magazine was Kindness, I started asking myself some questions about the energy that surrounds the word. Initially I was struck by my somewhat superficial, even blasé, impression of the word.

My first association of kindness is a thoughtful action towards another person. Often termed a 'random act of kindness'. I also think of kindness as being kind-hearted towards myself, such as listening to my body and creating an inner dialogue that is friend rather than foe.

Yes, true enough, but I felt like I was relying on clichés. I asked myself to dig a little deeper...

Does kindness have a shadow side? Also, are there misconceptions around the word and what it conjures in the heart and mind of others?

In its truest form, kindness is unconditional benevolence and allowance towards ourselves and others. When we truly hold this frequency it naturally emanates from our being, it filters through our thoughts and it is expressed via our authentic actions.

In its illusory disguise, kindness can easily tip over into pleasing or rescuing. Such actions come at an energetic price: exhaustion, resentment and anger, to name but a few.

I think most, if not all of us, have experienced a kind action gone wrong. When this happens, we're left holding up our hands in gob-smacked wonder (and often a lot of frustration!) at how such a thoughtful gesture on our part could go so pear-shaped, yielding an outcome we never expected. (We need only look to our family/friend environment as an action-packed playground for this life lesson!)

A key word in that last paragraph is 'expected'. Another closely associated word is 'fantasy'. When we take action and it is rooted in fantasy (i.e. an illusion that has no basis other than our own desired outcome) and we combine it with a good dose of expectation (i.e. when I do this, that person will respond like this and then I will feel like this) we have set ourselves up for disappointment.

In its extreme form, our ego-identity can become so deeply invested in appearing 'a kind and nice person' that we disassociate from our own needs and focus almost entirely on the needs of others. Our precious energetic and physical body is pushed to the point of creating dis-ease in a bid to get our attention, so we can become aware of an unconscious pattern of behaviour.

Wow, it seemed like my initial impression of kindness was taking on a much more expansive meaning.

Often kindness is associated with positive action; it is not termed an 'act of kindness' for nothing. It is a word that is strongly

linked with verbs: helping out a friend, listening to your neighbour, buying your mother flowers, contributing to a worthy cause and so on.

But what if, sometimes, the kindest thing is the opposite to doing? What if the greatest kindness is conscious inaction?

For instance, there are some life situations in which your inaction is in the highest good for all concerned; it is the greatest kindness you can offer. This may mean not helping a friend, not lending money, not coming to the rescue of your child or not going to that family event.

In certain circumstances, 'helping out' or 'showing up' is not only impeding the growth of the person or the people in which your kindness is directed, it is hindering your own growth.

It is never in our highest good to act outside of our integrity. We can be incredibly challenged in this area, especially when our inner knowing is at odds with what is considered unkind or socially rude by others. What you know in your heart and body to be kindness towards yourself or others may be perceived as selfish or even hurtful by the majority of those around you.

Honestly ask yourself: What is the intention behind my actions, or, inactions? Are my intentions based in consciousness and awareness?

Other times kindness is simply 'holding the space' for someone. (We can do this remotely or we can do this when a person is in our company.) I say simply, but this can initially feel very uncomfortable. For instance, when a friend or loved one is emotionally distraught our immediate reaction is often to placate and reassure, filling the space with words, opinions or solutions. Instead, we can stay grounded in our own energy, keep eye contact and hold the space for that person to release and process whatever they need to at that time. This can be a powerfully transformative process for both parties.

What have I learned from writing this article? Words are powerful. Words can also trigger strong, unconscious reactions and repetitive patterns in us. It is not about getting hung-up on a word, rather, it is about looking at the deeper meaning of particular words we take for granted. This expands our understanding of ourselves and how we interact with the world around us.

When we want to define a word, our first port of call is often the dictionary. What's much more revealing is asking ourselves for our own personal definition.

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