

Without kindness, ethical principles can lose their value

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The London Free Press, Sept. 26, 2020 (Online version)

Without kindness even normal ethical actions may lose much of their influence. For example, justice without kindness can sometimes be harsh. Honesty without kindness at its worst may take on an uncaring touch of cruelty.

There is a tone of softness and caring attached to kindness. Words that are similar to kindness such as compassion, concern, comforting, courtesy and charitableness indicate thoughtfulness about other people. Kindness means we can identify with others especially when we understand their troubles or their need for help. Kindness means we are thoughtful about the plight of our fellow humans. In everyday language kind people are willing to “walk in the shoes” of others and understand their difficulties and their needs.

True kindness is given without external rewards for the giver, although it is rewarding when receivers of kindness thank you and acknowledge your help. But the best kindness does not require thankful comments. At its best, true kindness makes us feel that we are the kind of person we would like everyone else to be.

So far, I have emphasized that kindness requires a tenderness and sensitivity in order to be effective. But there are times when kindness also requires firmness or inner discipline in order to work well. Some people call this “tough love.” If you are a teacher or a parent and you want to instill good work habits and carefulness in children sometimes you may need to be firm in order to be kind.

When you care enough about children to help them develop habits that will serve them well throughout their lives and you want to make life good for them, this is a gift to their maturity. You aspire to developing knowledge and skills and habits that will make their lives productive and happy because you care about their welfare.

When children are young, it may be easier at that time to accede to their wants and wishes but your experience in living directs you to be kind by developing habits that will in the long run bring them the greatest rewards of happiness. The wisdom of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, in writing about ethics, emphasized that the

development of good habits was one of the greatest kindnesses one could offer to children.

In more modern times, Mother Teresa who in 1997 became Saint Teresa of Calcutta was widely known for her kindness and her help towards the most needy and poor in India. She was born August 26, 1910 in Macedonia. Her kindness was recognized on many occasions such as in 1979 when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In her earlier life she taught from 1931 to 1948 as a teaching nun in a secondary school. She was kind but firm in helping students develop self-discipline because she knew that in the long run this would be a kindness and a help to her students. Mother Teresa has been well recognized throughout much of the world by people of many religious faiths, as well as by thoughtful secular thinkers, for her contribution towards helping the poor and needy. She has set a great example of what kindness can do to make for a better world.

There is a theory that in order for people to understand the poor and needy one must have experienced such conditions in their own life. Yet this was not the case with Mother Teresa, who came from a wealthy family. In spite of growing up within a wealthy family she was able to comprehend the needs of the poor. She reached out to help those in poverty and in need of compassion, caring, and kindness.

Kindness is a good moderating factor in developing and supporting ethics and morality. It enables people and governments to work towards world harmony and peace. Without the spirit of kindness, the ethical principles of justice, equity and fairness lose much of their value.