

# LITTLE KINDNESSES

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In our fast paced world of hustle bustle living it is easy to forget the little things. Our "global village" has become smaller because of TV., fax, air travel, computers, etc., while life has become more overwhelming. Warehouse or depot stores dwarf us as our memory searches for the neighborhood Mom and Pop groceries, hardware, toy stores, of times gone by. Products themselves are larger than ever as are their price tags. In response to all this pressure it is easy for us to feel insignificant and lesser than.

So too, the mall crawl takes longer and longer as the size and diversity of shopping/eating/spending opportunities increase. In having reached the post Aquarius Age of Marketing and Distribution we are surrounded not only by products, but with their by-products - Debt! To make our stretched ends meet, work has become an ever more consuming vulture of our time. Living gobbles up our disposable income, while affording ourselves gobbles up our disposable time.

The results make for a sad sociological sitcom that stars a cast of millions. Meanwhile, too many are cast in depression and anxiety, isolated from neighbors, overwhelmed by responsibilities, overburdened by stresses and alienated by injustices large and larger with no time or energy to listen to relaxation tapes. What happened to the forecasters of the 60's who worried about what we would do with our leisure time? We seem to have solved those problems with single parenthood, double jobs, triple bi-passes and quadruple digit debts.

Such an environment has created a variety of conditions that are not healthy for human growth and development. In fact, it contributes to a corrosive component in our lives that undermines our copeability and sabotages our stability.

The conditions of which I speak run counter to our needs as people. Like a sailboat that has lost its anchor, American Society seems to be slowly moving in a direction that is further

and further away from the shoreline of our basic natures. As the winds of change increase, so we drift further over troubled waters. The search for a stable bridge yields a variety of disorders, dysfunctions and Donahuesque topics. In this wake life is just a bowl of support groups. Without wanting to add to our unhappiness, this article aims to remind us all of the simple ways we can salve our wounds and those whom we love.

The fact is that people, all people, need the same basic things and always have. These generic ingredients are timeless with no room for generation gaps. These are:

love and reassurance  
attention and acknowledgement  
appreciation and reciprocation

## **A POUND OF PROTECTION IS WORTH AN OUNCE OF CARE!**

While by no means a profound analysis, it is one of which we need to be reminded from time to time. This is especially true given that our



pressures interfere with our ability to satisfy these needs for those whom we love. In fact, there is an epidemic of unfulfillment of these needs in our country. Many are literally starving for attention and forced to settle for substitutes (ie. food, material possessions, etc.) or superficial and temporary salves (ie. drugs, affairs, etc.)

While it is easy and self-protective to blame all of this on time and pressures, it is important to acknowledge that many have a hard time giving positive, affectionate, loving feelings. It can feel awkward, embarrassing and silly. Others may feel that in so doing they are letting themselves be vulnerable. One of the many byproducts of our accelerated, liberated times is that trust levels have been deeply shaken. Intimacy has become a threatening place, to be avoided completely or approached in a hit and run fashion. For others, previous hurts create high levels of anger which becomes their dominant expressive state. They are either angry or neutral, but rarely if ever, positive or loving. Sometimes what keeps people from recognizing and reinforcing their loved ones is a combination of all of the above.

Regardless of cause the problem is undeniably serious and taking its toll on both individuals and relationships of all kinds. Ironically, for many work has become the place to get their emotional needs met. In a variety of ways, organizations and work roles do a far better job affirming and reinforcing individual worth than do individuals or families. Yet, work is not sufficient to fully satisfy our human needs.

In addition to being liked by those for and with whom we work, it is important that we be loved by those with whom we live. Of critical importance is that this be more than sounds of silence affirmations. "But you know I love you, why do I have to say/show it?" kinds of responses are not sufficient to satisfy needs for ongoing acknowledgement. Knowing is cold and cognitive. Feeling loved allows us to enjoy the emotional warmth that comes with it.

Experiencing love reassures our less secure parts and bathes us with nourishment. Emotional warmth is a necessary ingredient for our health and well being. We can ill afford to continue on a lean emotional cuisine diet which starves our psyches and our souls.

#### GROW UP

For some, my words sound as if they apply to infants and children, but not to adults. Our limited emotional perspective and solid wall of defenses do not tolerate much feeling based hanky panky. For men, the typical reflexive response is antithetical to our supposed machoness. Being a real man is not being a feel man. To feel is even worse than to eat quiche! Men, according to cultural myth are in control of their emotions which converts to uptight, inhibited, self-consciousness. If at all, sexuality becomes their comfortable way to express feelings.

Men, however, do not have a lock on emotional suppression. There are a multitude of female varieties that run the gamut from sexual to hysterical acting out, to not so anonymous overeater's, to the silently saddened to the complaining, fatigued and overwhelmed. Ironically, not fulfilling child based adult emotional needs produces a variety of adult based, child-like behaviors. To those who say "Grow Up" in response to my pleas for emotional expression and loving kindnesses, I say "GROW UP!" and stop acting out in childlike ways of indulgence, isolation or insulation. All addicts, no matter what their substance of choice (drugs, sex, food, clothes, work, cars, people, etc.) are Jonesing for love in all the wrong places.

The truth is that we are all Adult Children of something or other. Our child based tapes were well learned and are solidly in place. Moreover, our child based needs are still with us as are our child based hurts and frustrations. That we need loving affirmation only means we are alive and like other animals large or small, young or old require TLC as much as we require the satisfaction of our physically driven needs. Like it or

not, believe it or not, allow it or not the human condition, from cradle to cryonics is love based. The deprivation of that leads to a variety of maladaptive reactions based in hurt and hate and their by-products, self-deflation and self-defeat.

#### CARING TO CARE

There are a variety of ways that we as people can be more caring of those toward whom we care. Care must be taken not to fall into a "take for granted" mode so typical of human nature. Whether it be relationships or possessions, there seems to be a natural human tendency to make unimportant, that which was once obsessively sought after. Take the courtship process itself. One meets that special someone and is smitten. He/she can't get the other out of his/her mind and behaves as if possessed - attentive to a fault, bestowing all varieties of kindness and understanding.

Putting ones best foot forward and most accepting parts in full gear can present an irresistible pose. Once having attained the goal of commitment many do a rapid about face forgetting just how important that other person was to their sanity and survival. The basis of the previous obsession too easily becomes the source of their present depression. How quickly people go from feeling pangs of the heart to pains in the head.

Lest we be quick to personalize being taken for granted, let us remember that the same applies to material items of all kinds. The once hotly sought after apparel item, home improvement or technological gadget too quickly is neglected or abandoned for a more updated wish list. The dream home with a pool in the yard soon becomes a financial and maintenance burden with a pool utilization rate only slightly higher than a gutted tenement.

Obviously discarding a shirt or dress for the latest fashions "they" are now wearing is not such an important issue. Nor is never using the programming features of your VCR, limiting your time in the backyard pools to an annual visit or infrequently using your

must have "toy" of a year ago. Avoiding or minimizing emotional receptivity toward loved ones, however, is a far more serious issue with far more damaging implications. The remainder of this article will serve to remind us all of how we can be more caring people in a world that is often too busy, too stressed and too tired to care much about anything.

#### **AN IMBALANCED LINE**

Even the casual observer will be struck by the fact that while there are many ways to inflict little and not so little torments, there are far fewer ways of expressing kindness. In some cases we deal with one sided, pain inflicting behaviors. What is the opposite, for example, of a spouse having an affair, a child running away from home or a sibling not ever talking to us over some minor conflict?

Similarly, there are numerous hurt words and phrases that can jab at every aspect of our personhood (ie. intelligence, appearance, generosity, sexual adequacy, morality, social status, etc.) but not nearly so many than can be enhancing. Compare as well the impact of hurtful and helpful statements. "You are a cheap, penny pinching miser," hits hard. "You are a most generous man" is luke warm at best. "You look like a fat pig," throws us to the floor, while "You look very nice," hardly has us dancing on the ceiling.

In addition, we must reckon with social convention and expectation. Doing what is proper, appropriate, helpful and supportive is expected and often not praised or acknowledged. Doing what is not is to open oneself up to ridicule, criticism or angry rebuke. The opposite of a dirty home or serving a frozen TV dinner, being unemployed, or a weekend away with the guys is normative and therefore not worthy of comment. Those conditions, however, will typically evoke a variety of not so kindly reactions. In addition, as we have previously said we are not, by nature and design oriented to positive reinforcement. For most negativity is natural and free flying while, its opposite is neutrality and non-chalance.

By social convention, language and style we are not oriented to be kindly and affirming in our interactions with others. Little kindnesses can be few and far between. Mostly, we are tough markers curving our grading scales from C - F. This obviously limits the available strokes in the universe and forcing more and more to give them to themselves. While this is important and better than nothing, an effort to increase the flow of positive, praise based kindness could eliminate much pain and thousands of therapy hours.

#### **LITTLE KINDNESSES, BIG STEPS**

Promoting little kindness is necessary to esteem and shoring up our sagging self-confidence. Such a healing force comes at a welcome time in our lives when we can use a boost in our egos to counteract the many erosive and corrosive forces that surrounds us. Little kindnesses can serve both a protective and preventative function. They are an oasis for an otherwise parched and arid landscape.

Let us look then at those ways in which we can give small kindnesses to those we love and care about while receiving back a variety of benefits. Little kindnesses give birth to the same in return.

#### **VERBAL**

Words are powerful carriers of kindness and can be used in a variety of simple ways. For some it comes naturally, while others must push the words from their tight moorings. In either case, the words we chose can make a significant difference in the receiver's moods.

Verbal kindness can include the following:

Compliments: "You look very nice"

Greetings: "Just a letter/call to say hello and say I miss you"

Accolades: "I'm proud of you"

Affirmations: "I'm confident you will do well"

Appreciation: "Thanks for doing that for me. It meant alot"

Acknowledgement: "You are an important person in my life and a very special part of it"

Endearments: A limitless variety of names, words and terms of endearment

Patience: Accepting the idiosyncracies of our parents, spouses, lovers, children, etc. without condemnation or denigration. Avoiding verbal abuse!

#### **PHYSICAL**

Touch touches us all. While some recoil in defensive withdrawal, all people need human contact. In the beginning that is all we had and that along with some food and a clean diaper was all we needed. Remember we all started out as infants hungry for the gentle hand or soft kiss of another. We still need it just the same.

Touch: Hugs, pats, strokes, kisses, rubs, massages, tickles and endless variations on the theme. Important to note is that we can touch without it being a prelude to sex. Touch can sometimes be an end in itself, sometimes a basis for more.

Symbols: Gifts, flowers, candy, perfume, cards, etc.

Reciprocation: Doing caring behaviors in appreciation for caring behaviors. Acting kindly. Being sensitive to loved ones needs. Demonstrating support!

#### **CREATIVE**

The arts are love based and always have been. One need not be a Laureate or a Rembrandt to draw upon these avenues to express little kindnesses.

Poems: For no reason or special occasions, rhyming or otherwise.

Pictures: On napkins, legal folders or sketch pads, photos or xerox copies, cut outs from magazines or comic books.

Games: Not the typical game playing, a.k.a. manipulation and control. This is personalized and filled with acknowledgement, affirmation or love.

Play has always been a language that our child parts understand. Like hiding an engagement ring in the cracker jack box or under caviar toast points. Or a very personal, housebound scavenger hunt where you are the last item on the list.

Or traditional lay around games such as playing monopoly, scrabble or cards - just like you used to do in the beginning.

Silly or Handmade Gifts: Anything goes as long as it expresses your feelings. Be original, personal and creative. You can be emotionally expansive without it being expensive.

Gifts of the heart do not have to cost an arm and a leg. How many baubles are as empty as soap bubbles? It's the meaning, not the money that provides a true measure of worth and value.

That last statement pretty well sums things up. Little Kindnesses are, by definition, small. Their size and impact are opposite. It takes the giver, little, it means a great deal to the receiver. We all need little kindnesses to grow larger emotionally. We all need to be attentive to giving them to those toward whom we feel love and caring. If people did this consistently, I and my colleagues wouldn't have much of a job. So take that as a challenge. Put us out of work through practicing a philosophy of little kindnesses. Ensure that you and your loved ones never need our services. Allow little kindnesses to salve old wounds and prevent new ones from occurring.

Give Now! At home, at the office and in your journey to and fro. Little Kindnesses can go a long way in lightening our load. They can truly make our universe a kinder, gentler place and make us stronger, happier and more able to give to others. Let us stop the vicious cycles of hate, hurt and personal defeat and create caring cycles of little kindnesses that will enhance our lives, lovingly.