



Force of Kindness, by Sharon Shalzberg

Many of us long for an underlying sense of meaning, something we can still believe in no matter what happens to us, a navigational force to pull all the disparate pieces of our lives together into some kind of whole. Perhaps we find ourselves feeling helpless when even a little too much of the unexpected occurs, defenseless when we find we don't

have control over a situation and can't fathom what might happen next, unsure of where to turn when we aren't having the positive effect we want with a troubled family member or a friend. In any of these circumstances, and in so many more, we shut down. Then we go through the motions of our day, day after day, without much dynamism or spirit.

Many of us experience ourselves as fragmented, perhaps as confident and expressive when we are with our families but a completely different person when we are at work, frequently hesitant and unsure. Perhaps we take risks when we are with others but are timid when alone, or are cozily comfortable when alone yet are painfully shy and withdrawn when with others. Or maybe we drift along with the tides of circumstance, going up and down, not knowing what we might really care about more than anything else, but thinking there must be _something._

To explore kindness as that thread of meaning requires finding out if we can be strong and still be kind, be smart and still be kind, whether we can be profoundly kind to ourselves and at the same time strongly dedicated to kindness for those around us. We have to find the power in kindness, the confidence in kindness, the release in kindness; the type of kindness that transcends belief systems, allegiances, ideologies, cliques, and tribes. This is the trait that can transform our lives.

Kindness is the fuel that helps us truly "walk our talk" of love, a quality so easy to speak about or extol but often so hard to make real. It helps us to genuinely care for one another and for ourselves as well. Kindness is the foundation of unselfconscious generosity, natural inclusivity, and an unfeigned integrity. When we are devoted to the development of kindness, it becomes our ready response, so that reacting from compassion, from caring, is not a question of giving ourselves a lecture: "I don't really feel like it, but I'd better be helpful, or what would people think." When we are devoted to the development of kindness, we are no longer forcing ourselves into a mold we think we have to occupy; rather, it becomes a movement of the heart so deep and subtle that it is like a movement of the sea close to the ocean floor, all but hidden yet affecting absolutely

everything that happens above. Thatâ€™s the force of kindness.

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