



## Kindness Includes Everything, by George Saunders

What I regret most in my life are \_failures of kindness.Â \_Those moments when another human being was there, in front of me, suffering, and I responded ... sensibly. Reservedly. Mildly.

Or, to look at it from the other end of the telescope: Who, in \_your\_ life, do you remember most fondly, with the most undeniable feelings of warmth? Â Those who were kindest to you, I bet.Â Itâ€™s a little facile, maybe, and certainly hard to implement, but Iâ€™d say, as a goal in life, you could do worse than:Â \_Try to be kinder.\_

Now, the million-dollar question: Whatâ€™s our problem? Why arenâ€™t we kinder?

Hereâ€™s what I think:Â Each of us is born with a series of built-in confusions that are probably somehow Darwinian. These are: (1) weâ€™re central to the universe (that is, our personal story is the main and most interesting story, the \_only\_ story, really); (2) weâ€™re separate from the universe (thereâ€™s US and them, out there, all that other junk â€“ dogs and swing-sets, and the State of Nebraska and low-hanging clouds and, you know, other people), and (3) weâ€™re permanent (death is real, o.k., sure â€“ for you, but not for me).

Now, we donâ€™t \_really\_ believe these things â€“ intellectually we know better â€“ but we believe them viscerally, and live by them, and they cause us to prioritize our own needs over the needs of others, even though what we really want, in our hearts, is to be less selfish, more aware of whatâ€™s actually happening in the present moment, more open, and more loving.

So, the second million-dollar question: How might we DO this? How might we become more loving, more open, less selfish, more present, less delusional, etc., etc?

Well, yes, good question. Â Unfortunately, I only have three minutes left.

So let me just say this. There \_are\_ ways. You already know that because, in your life, there have been High Kindness periods and Low Kindness periods, and you know what inclined you toward the former and away from the latter. Education is good; immersing ourselves in a work of art: good; prayer is good; meditationâ€™s good; a frank talk with a dear friend; establishing ourselves in some kind of spiritual

tradition â€” recognizing that there have been countless really smart people before us who have asked these same questions and left behind answers for us.

Because kindness, it turns out, is \_hard\_ â€” it starts out all rainbows and puppy dogs, and expands to include . . . well, \_everything\_.

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