

The background is a watercolor wash of various shades of blue, ranging from deep, dark blues to light, airy blues, with some white space. The texture is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and color blending.

Kindness is my real
religion

—THE DALAI LAMA

Overview of four-week series



1. Practical Approaches



2. Effective Care



3. “One Bright Pearl”



4. Nothing Left to Lose



Happiness Machine

YESCELA VORAZAN



Red pill or
Blue pill?

What is “kindness”?

Niceness?

Rather: treating one other as kinfolk

Kinship: a fluffy spiritual metaphor or a literal fact.
We are kin.

“kind” and “kin” derive from the ancient word *kunjam*, which means “family.”

kunjam-iz—literally “family-ish”= a natural sense of care (Proto-German)

Greek: *kharis*: actual behavior intended to help another *for the sake of another*.

Spiritual growth = becoming more kind. Not a private experience.

Kindness is a fact-based virtue

We are kin genetically, but also in that we all want whatever we think will make us happy.

Honesty: not to deceive ourselves about our often inconvenient but always inescapable relatedness to others.

Vast needless suffering comes from our refusal to see this interconnectedness. We all suffer needlessly because we don't see things as they are.

Fact-based virtue rejects confusions generated by our genes and reinforced by our culture.

Honesty also: our actions can make a real difference in others' lives; justifications for apathy and nihilism don't hold up.

No guarantees; and good intentions are not enough.

George Saunders

In seventh grade, this new kid joined our class; she was small and shy. She was mostly ignored, occasionally teased and I could see this hurt her.

Relative to most of the other kids, I was actually pretty nice to her. I never said an unkind word to her.

But still. It bothers me.

What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness, moments when another human being was there, in front of me, suffering, and I responded . . . sensibly.

--from *Congratulations, By the Way*

Naomi Shahib Nye

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
You must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
Lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,

How he was someone
Who journeyed through the night with plans
And the simple breath that kept him alive.

--from "Kindness"

Tenzin Gyatso

I am a staunch Buddhist, but kindness is my real religion. There is no need for complicated philosophy, doctrine, or dogma. Our own heart, our own mind, is the temple. The doctrine is compassion. Love for others and respect for their rights and dignity, no matter who or what they are - these are ultimately all we need.

When you practice with a sense of dedication to the well-being of others, then you yourself feel fulfilled. This is the purpose of our life. What is the point of having a luxurious way of life, spending lots of money, while on the same planet others are facing terrible difficulties, even starving? Helping others, serving others--this is the real meaning of life.

If you believe that God created us as social beings, then there must be some deep meaning in this. As social beings, the very basis of our life is taking care each other, showing concern, helping one another.

Albert Einstein

A human being is a part of the whole called by us the universe, a part limited in time and space. Yet we experience ourselves — our thoughts and feelings — as separate from the rest. This is a kind of optical delusion of consciousness.

This delusion is like a prison, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.

Einstein also . . .

The psychological roots of war, in my view, be in a biologically based, aggressive peculiarity of the human being. We 'masters of creation' are not the only ones who may claim the glory of this gift; we are surpassed in this respect by many animals, such as the bull or rooster. Whenever human beings confront one another, this aggressive tendency becomes manifest. In a tightly constricted society it comes out in quarrels and even murder.

Siddhartha Gautama

Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Outwards and unbounded,

Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking,
seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.

The monk with dysentery

The Blessed One, on an inspection tour of the lodgings with Ven. Ananda as his attendant, went to [a certain] monk's dwelling and, on arrival, saw the monk lying fouled in his own urine & excrement.

He asked: “Why don't the monks attend to him?”

Ananda: "He doesn't do anything for the monks, lord, which is why they don't attend to him.”

The Buddha had the monks assembled and said:

"Monks, you have no mother, you have no father, who might tend to you. If you don't tend to one another, who then will tend to you? Whoever would tend to me, should tend to the sick.

Confucius (551-479 bce)

Ren

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Goodness (ren) is “human-human-ness” or “co-humanity”

The highest virtue. Compared to protective feelings adults may have toward children.

No one is identified as fully living up to it, although all are capable and some come close.

Human-heartedness

Do not treat others as you would not wish to be treated.

“Take ourselves as an example,” which means treating others as we would wish to be treated if roles were reversed.

Treating others as fully human subjects rather than as objects that hinder or help our own pleasure.

Natural Empathy and . . .

Mencius: the example of a child falling down a well. Witnesses of this immediately feel “alarm and distress, not to gain friendship with the child's parents, nor to seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor because they dislike the reputation [of lack of humanity if they did not rescue the child]...”

This sense of empathy, feeling of commiseration, is the natural “starting point of humanity,” like a sprout ready to grow if given the right conditions.

Ritual Training

Li—ritual, following outward social forms until we spontaneously act with consideration. Training in ritual over decades, we come to embody the spirit behind it and thus to know how to use and adapt it.

Ritual/rules allows us to train in goodness, yet only as we become good do we know best how to employ ritual. This circular relationship means that there is no single magic formula, but there is an open Way (dao) for those who apply themselves.

“I have yet to meet a man who loves virtue as much as he loves sex...” Confucius

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness . . .” Jesus

Aristotle (384-322 bce)

Invites us to see happiness, or “the good life, the fullest flourishing of our human potential (eudaimonia)

The good life (eudaimonia) involves many elements, such as health and having friends and having enough to eat.

But it also requires and most fundamentally involves the cultivation of virtues.

Edith Hall: Happiness for Aristotle comes from **habitually doing the right thing.**

Seeking what is best

We should care for ourselves, which means wishing what is best for ourselves

There are (1) those who seek only physical pleasure, (2) those who seek fame/recognition/praise, and (3) those who seek to learn and find mental satisfaction.

The last of these three seek what is best and have greater security in their happiness because it is not so much based on factors beyond their control; “selfreliance.” And: it brings about a more complete fulfillment of our human potential.

Virtue (*aretai*)

Virtue is the disposition to behave in the right manner, avoiding extremes of deficiency and excess.

Reasoning and instruction can help us understand what is needed, but we acquire virtue through habit and practice.

Choosing to be Happy

Happiness comes from creating virtuous habits of action. Virtues are things like: courage, patience, honesty, fairness, kindness, prudence, generosity . . .

They are all practice-acquired so as to become second-nature; habits become character so that we effortlessly avoid extremes

Virtues make those around you happier and this in turn (indirectly) makes you happier.

Virtue also contributes directly to your happiness; it helps constitute your happiness, apart from its effects on others.

Almost anyone can become happy by working, over time, to train themselves in the habits of doing good actions. This is our choice.

And Virtue Ethics

Aristotle approaches ethics, moral issues, without seeking out a universal set of rules.

Because of complexity of the world —every situation is different—it is better to focus on using reason to develop good habits instead of making universal rules.

This approach remains valuable today. Some have compared Buddhist ethics to virtue ethics.

To Be Human

Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Aristotle: What makes humans distinct from other living beings is our capacity for reason.

We can use reason to see that doing good things makes us happier.

We then use reason to work out, in each particular situation, the best actions to fulfill our good intentions.

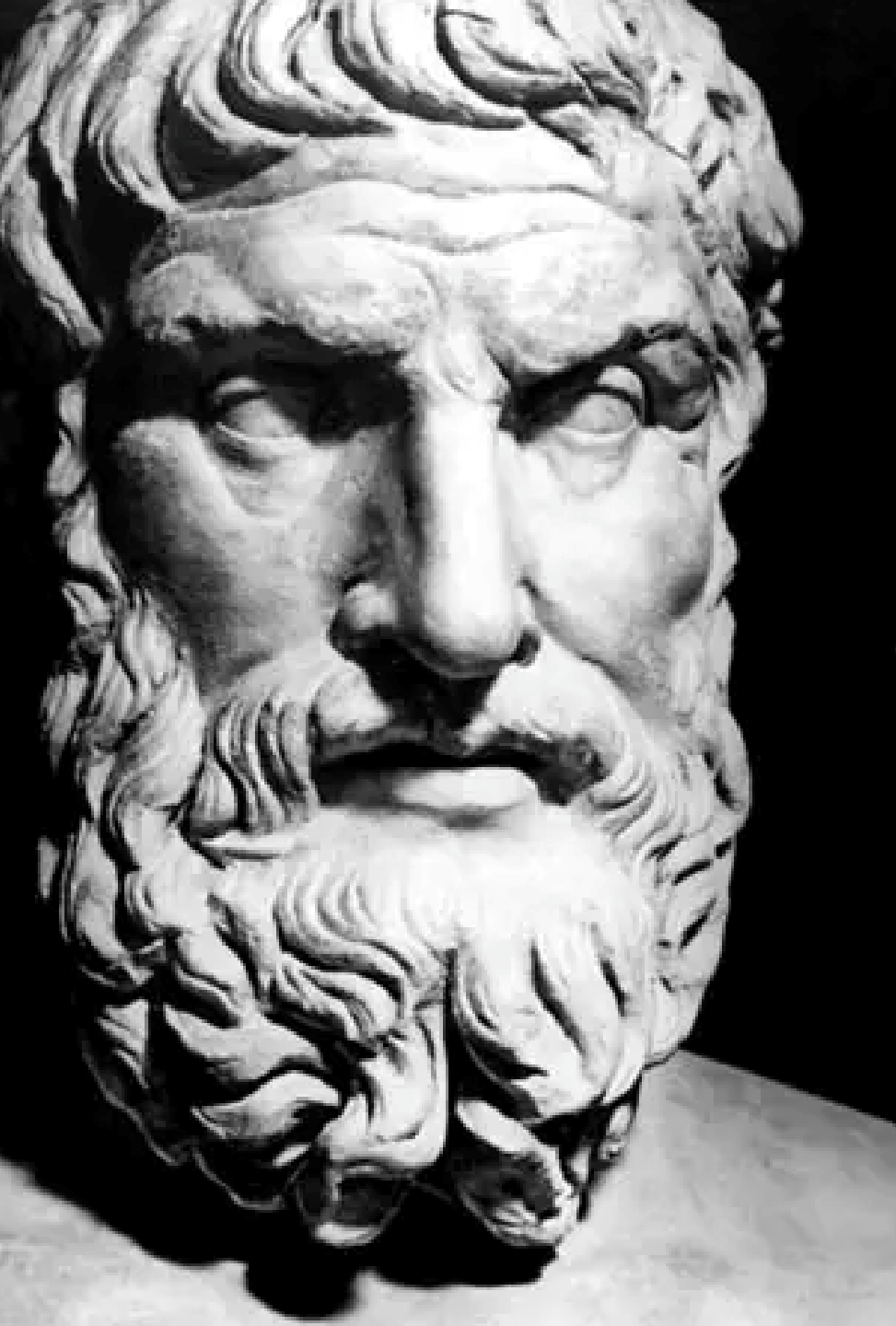
We do not live by absolute rules from outside human life. Nor do we live by a calculus for achieving the greatest good for the greatest number.

Common Sense

Instead, we find the most practical way, in each situation, to fulfill good intentions that come from our virtues, our ingrained habits of virtue.

Virtues lie in at the mean, the middle path, between extremes. Courage, for example, is between the deficient boldness of timidity and excessive boldness of recklessness.

There is no universal/absolute "middle." Avoiding deficiency and excess depends on the person and situation.



Epictetus (55-135)

Marcus
Aurelius
(121-180)



Stoics on kindness

“The most surprising thing you can do to an unkind person is to respond with kindness. They will have no idea how to respond themselves because they have only known unkindness from those around them.”

– Marcus Aurelius

“The only thing that isn’t worthless: to live this life out truthfully and rightly. And be patient with those who don’t.”

– Marcus Aurelius

More stoics

“Kindness is unconquerable, so long as it is without flattery or hypocrisy. For what can the most insolent man do to you, if you contrive to be kind to him, and if you have the chance gently advise and calmly show him what is right... you must not do this with sarcasm or reproach, but lovingly and without anger in your soul.”

– Marcus Aurelius

“Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for a kindness.”

– Seneca

The daily stoic

Stress and struggle harden us. It makes us turn inward. With more than expected on our plate, we have less time, less patience, less sympathy for others. We're dealing with our own problems, trying to keep those closest to us safe, just trying to get through it ourselves.

While this makes sense from a self-preservation standpoint, it's also a bit self-defeating. Because the more we focus on our own problems, the larger they become. The more we think about ourselves, the more pain and anger and despair we can feel.

One of the things you can do today is think about how you can be of use, how you can be of service. Vice Admiral James Stockdale, while in prison, was thinking about his men. He was trying to help. He united them in a common cause, together. "U.S.," he liked to say, "Unity Over Self."

Ubuntu

The quality or essence of being a person.

Desmond Tutu: “A person is made a person by other persons.”

(Xhosa: ungamntu ngabanye abantu; Shona: munhu unoitwa munhu nevamwe.)

I am because we are kin;

"I am because we are"

"I am because you are"

"humanity towards others"

To be a person is to recognize that my subjectivity is in part constituted by other persons with whom I share the social world. (Eze)

Martin Buber (1878-1965): true spirituality must be interpersonal

Jewish thinker famous for his book *I and Thou*.

Human existence is about “encounter” and relationship, dialogue rather than monologue

“I-It” is a relationship between a person and what the person regards and treats as an object or instrument.

We are more deeply fulfilled as humans through “I-Thou” relationships in which each person regards the other as subject.

Buber claims that I-Thou is the only way in which it is possible to interact with God . . .

And that an I-Thou relationship with anything or anyone connects us with the eternal relation to God.

Shantideva (8th century)

Indian Buddhist monk and author of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

(*Bodhisattvacaryavatara*)



Switching of Self and Other

First of all I should make an effort
To meditate upon the equality between myself and others:
I should protect all beings as I do myself
Because we are all equal in (wanting) pleasure and (not wanting) pain.

Although there are many different parts and aspects such as the hand,
As a body that is to be protected they are one.
Likewise all the different sentient beings in their pleasure and their pain
Have a wish to be happy that is the same as mine.

The suffering that I experience
Does not cause any harm to others.
But that suffering (is mine) because of my conceiving of (myself as) “I”;
Thereby it becomes unbearable.

Shantideva continued

Hence I should dispel the misery of others
Because it is suffering, just like my own,
And I should benefit others
Because they are sentient beings, just like myself.

When both myself and others
Are similar in that we wish to be happy,
What is so special about me?
Why do I strive for my happiness alone?

-But why should I protect them
If their suffering does not cause me any harm? –
Then why protect myself against future suffering
If it causes me no harm now?

Shantideva

- Surely whenever there is suffering
The (sufferer) must protect himself from it-
But the suffering of the foot is not that of the hand,
Why then does it protect it?
- Although this may not be justified,
It is done because of grasping at a self-
But surely whatever is not justified for myself or others
Should at all costs be rejected.

Shantideva

Being no (inherent) owner of suffering

There can be no distinction at all between (that of myself and others).

Thus I shall dispel it [suffering] because it hurts:

Why am I so certain (that I shouldn't eliminate the suffering of others)?

-But (since neither the suffering nor the sufferer truly exist), why should I turn away the misery of all?-

There is no ground for argument,

For if I prevent my own (sufferings), surely I should prevent the (sufferings) of all.

If not, since I am just like (other) sentient beings, (I should not prevent my own suffering either).

Thus whoever wishes to quickly afford protection

To both himself and other beings

Should practice that holy secret:

The exchanging of self for others.

Shantideva

Whatever joy there is in the world
All comes from desiring others to be happy,
And whatever suffering there is in the world
All comes from desiring myself to be happy.

The childish work for their own benefit,
The Buddhas work for the benefit of others.
Just look at the difference between them!

If I do not actually exchange my happiness
For the suffering of others,
I shall not attain the state of Buddhahood
And even in cyclic existence shall have no joy.

If all the injury,
Fear and pain in this world
Arise from grasping at a self,
Then of what use is that ghost to me?

HHDL (July 6, 1935-)

As I began to put in more effort into these practices, familiarizing my own thoughts with the ideals of altruism, bodhicitta and so on, then gradually I felt that my own mind was getting closer. My affinity for these practices was also getting stronger and stronger so that later when I thought about altruism and its ideals of working for the benefit of other sentient beings, it no longer seemed impossible or distant.

A process of change occurring. Just as with me, all of you have exactly the same potential. There is nothing special about me; I do not possess any special capabilities or any unique potential. The potential that I have for inner transformation is exactly the same that all of you have.

HHDL

Therefore if you also undertake the practices you will also go through this transformation. You will also benefit, gain the fruits of your practices.

Right now, when one thinks about the ideals of cherishing the wellbeing of other sentient beings and regarding others' welfare as more important than one's own, such notions may seem impossible. They may seem impractical, beyond one's understanding and experience.

Gradually as one trains one's mind and develops constant familiarity with these ideals and practices then one will get to a point where they no longer seem inconceivable but in fact one will joyfully embrace them.

HHDL

One will joyfully dedicate one's life to the ideals of serving others and cherishing the wellbeing of other sentient beings. Service to others will be seen as one's very purpose for life.

When this happens then one's service to others is totally unconditional and one's caring for others is also totally unconditional with no consideration for any reward or recognition from others. One's motivation will be completely altruistic and unconditional.