

The Kindness Blessing

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There's been one thing in my life that I've always tried (and often failed) to follow. Whenever I'm having a bad day, or I'm having an argument with someone I care about, or generally being a grumpy, cynical, negative and off-putting kind of person, I have to remind myself: To give more to others than they give to you is a *blessing*. Doing unreciprocated kindness, in whatever form that takes, isn't simply morally right, and isn't just a duty; it's a privilege and adopting it as an philosophy to live by sets you free from the burden of allowing *other* people's actions to control your own emotional state.

There's always this cliché about paying kindness forward, starting a chain that goes on in perpetuity and never ends, a ray of kindness starting at point "Me" and never ending. I have a confession: I've never been convinced by this cliché. Maybe it's just too much rainbows and butterflies, too overwhelmingly positive without a look at the tough, dark nature of the lives we sometimes have to live. There are people who will receive that ray of kindness and never pass it on, never do anything with the positive energy you presumably cast into their lives. We've *all* been that person. There is no shame in admitting our imperfections, our weaknesses: they are what bind us together at times more than our strengths.

However, I think the flaw in this idea of paying it forward is that when other people don't do the job we now suddenly expect of them, of shining the kindness that we feel is our own creation toward other people, we get angry and discouraged. And when they instead consume the kindness and give back actions based on anger and selfishness, we get angry ourselves. Why aren't they as good as us? Why can't they just make an attempt to be a force for good for once? It disappoints us, poisons us, sickens us, repulses us, makes us want to retreat within ourselves and hate those that ruined our own efforts.

There is an obvious hypocrisy in that line of thinking, one that I'd be a hypocrite myself not to take responsibility for in my own life. That's why it's so important to constantly be mindful, to train ourselves to remember *giving more to others than they give you is a blessing*.

It's hard, thinking that way. It's quite literally an impossible task to live that statement all the time. People who do get philosophies, religions, and books based on their actions. We aren't that perfect.

But it's an important distinction between a blessing and a duty. Blessings are given to us as things we don't deserve but receive regardless, and the use of blessing in this instance has two purposes. One, you are giving others a blessing if they won't distribute your kindness given to them towards others, but that's an extremely pretentious and holier-than-thou way to approach interactions with others. I prefer to think that by being able to produce good and give it towards others, you are being blessed with something that's quite difficult to achieve. And by knowing that you truly are giving towards others without expecting either a kindness or even a respect in return, you gain a sort of stoic knowledge that their actions can't affect your peace of mind.

Other people will *never* live up to your expectations if you are always waiting for them to pay your supposedly kind actions forward. So don't expect it. In fact, don't worry about their actions at all. You can control one thing and one thing only, and that is yourself. Your environment will change and it will be negative, and it will be tough and it won't be nice, and it will require personal perseverance to get through. So don't hitch your wagon of kindness to a train of other people's actions! Blaze your own trail!

I distinctly remember, and always will, one late, warm summer night, staying up until 4 am talking with my brother about if true, altruistic, perfectly generous kindness even existed. Even seemingly selfless actions make us *feel* good about ourselves, he argued. How wonderfully noble we are.

But if giving makes us feel good, isn't being able to give both to others *and* yourself a blessing? The great thing is that kindness doesn't have to come from a place of selfless altruism. We help ourselves too! We've been blessed!

And when others don't give back, remember you've been blessed even more. It's not many people that are gifted with the ability to produce positivity in a negative world.
