

A Guide in Humane Awareness

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For my dear sons:

Seth and Eytan

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Introduction

This guide will provide you with the opportunity to learn deeply about the simple concepts of kindness, cruelty and humaneness.

You may ask, if these concepts are so simple, why then take the time to learn about something we already know? We may even question, What is the value in doing this exercise?

Sometimes when we are talking with someone, we discover that we have been using a particular word incorrectly. Usually, a person points out our error, and we are glad for the information.

We can also look up a word in the dictionary, only to find that the word has a deeper meaning than what we previously had thought.

Take, for example, what do you mean when you use words such as kind and kindness? Take a few minutes to write down your definitions of kind and kindness.

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Here are definitions for the words kind and kindness, taken from Answers.com:

Dictionary: kind

adj., **kind-er**, **kind-est**.

1. Of a friendly, generous, or warm-hearted nature.
2. Showing sympathy or understanding; charitable: *a kind word*.
3. Humane; considerate: *kind to animals*.
4. Forbearing; tolerant: *Our neighbor was very kind about the window we broke*.
5. Generous; liberal: *kind words of praise*.
6. Agreeable; beneficial: *a dry climate kind to asthmatics*.

[Middle English, natural, kind, from Old English *gecynde*, natural.]

SYNONYMS *kind, kindly, kindhearted, benign, benevolent*. These adjectives mean having or showing a tender, considerate, and helping nature. *Kind* and *kindly* are the least specific: *thanked her for her kind letter; a kindly gentleman*. *Kindhearted* especially suggests an innately kind disposition: *a kindhearted teacher*. *Benign* implies gentleness and mildness: *benign intentions; a benign sovereign*. *Benevolent* suggests charitableness and a desire to promote the welfare or happiness of others: *a benevolent contributor*.

Dictionary: kindness

n.

1. The quality or state of being kind.
2. An instance of kind behavior: *I will always remember your many kindnesses to me*.

Thesaurus: kindness

noun

1. Kindly, charitable interest in others: [altruism](#), [beneficence](#), [benevolence](#), [benignancy](#), [benignity](#), [charitableness](#), [charity](#), [goodwill](#), [grace](#), [kindheartedness](#), [kindliness](#), [philanthropy](#). See [attitude/good attitude/bad attitude/neutral attitude](#), [kind/cruel](#).
2. A charitable deed: [benefaction](#), [beneficence](#), [benevolence](#), [benignity](#), [favor](#), [kindliness](#), [oblation](#), office (often used in plural), [philanthropy](#). See [give/take/reciprocity](#), [kind/cruel](#).
3. A kindly act: [favor](#), [good turn](#), [grace](#), [indulgence](#), [service](#). Archaic [benefit](#). See [help/harm/harmless](#).

What ever way that we may individually define kindness, we can agree that kindness is experienced. Take a few minutes to jot down your definition of experience:

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Here is a dictionary definition of the word experience:

Dictionary: experience (ɪk-spiˈrɪ-əns)

n.

1. The apprehension of an object, thought, or emotion through the senses or mind: *a child's first experience of snow.*
2.
 - a. Active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill: *a lesson taught by experience; a carpenter with experience in roof repair.*
 - b. The knowledge or skill so derived.
3.
 - a. An event or a series of events participated in or lived through.
 - b. The totality of such events in the past of an individual or group.

tr. v., -enced, -enc-ing, -enc-es.

To participate in personally; undergo: *experience a great adventure; experienced loneliness.*

[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *experientia*, from *experīens*, *experient-*, present participle of *experīrī*, to try.]

experienter ex-pe'ri-enc-er *n.*

Thesaurus: experience

noun

Personal knowledge derived from participation or observation: [acquaintance](#), [familiarity](#). See [knowledge/ignorance](#).

verb

1. To participate in or partake of personally: [feel](#), go through, [have](#), [know](#), [meet](#)¹ [\[with\]](#), [see](#), [suffer](#), taste (of), [undergo](#). *Archaic* [prove](#). *Idioms:* run up against. See [participate/abstain](#).
2. To be physically aware of through the senses: [feel](#), [have](#). See [knowledge/ignorance](#).
3. To undergo an emotional reaction: [feel](#), [have](#), [know](#), [savor](#), [taste](#). See [feelings](#).

What ever way that we may personally define experience, we can agree upon the fact that:

Experience = Thoughts + Feelings + Action + Awareness

Experience = Thoughts + Feelings + Action + Awareness directed towards an object.

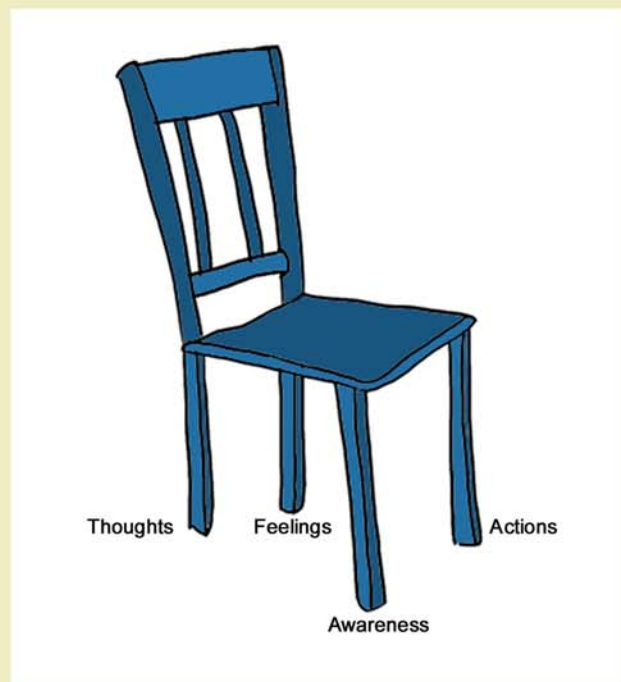
Objects can be:

Inanimate - Like a rock, minerals or a chair for example .

Animate - Like plants, animals and people .

You - You can be the object of your own experience when you, for example, are aware of your thoughts, or aware of your actions or aware of your feelings or being aware that you are aware of yourself.

Experience is like the four legs of a chair:



When you pull one leg of a chair, the three other legs follow.

For the purposes of this course,
the other significant word that we are looking at is "cruelty."

What do you mean when you use words such as cruel and cruelty?

Take a few minutes to write down your definitions of cruel and cruelty.

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Here are dictionary definitions of the words cruel and cruelty:

Dictionary: cruel (krü'äl)

adj., -el-er or -el-ler, -el-est or -el-lest.

1. Disposed to inflict pain or suffering.
2. Causing suffering; painful.

[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *crūdēlis*.]

cruelly cru'el-ly *adv.*

cruelness cru'el-ness *n.*

SYNONYMS *cruel, fierce, ferocious, barbarous, inhuman, savage, vicious.* These adjectives mean predisposed to inflict violence, pain, or hardship, or to find satisfaction in the suffering of others: *a cruel tyrant; a fierce warrior; a ferocious attack dog; a barbarous crime; inhuman treatment of captured soldiers; a savage outburst of temper; a vicious kick.*

[inhumanity](#), [savagery](#), [truculence](#), [truculency](#). See [attitude/good attitude/bad attitude/neutral attitude](#), [kind/cruel](#).

Dictionary: cruelty (krü'äl-tē)

n., *pl.* -ties.

1. The quality or condition of being cruel.
2. Something, such as a cruel act or remark, that causes pain or suffering.
3. *Law.* The infliction of physical or mental distress, especially when considered a determinant in granting a divorce.

Thesaurus: cruelty

noun

A cruel act or an instance of cruel behavior: [barbarity](#), [bestiality](#), [brutality](#), [inhumanity](#), [savagery](#), [truculence](#), [truculency](#). See [attitude/good attitude/bad attitude/neutral attitude](#), [kind/cruel](#).

Recap:

What we have learned so far:

- Sometimes, after we have been using a word, we find out that we have been using the word incorrectly or come to realize that we did know the full meaning of the word.
- Kindness and cruelty are experienced.
- Experience is directed towards an object, which can be inanimate, animate or oneself.

We can experience, for example:

- Something that is happening to us.
- Something that is happening to someone else.
- Something that we are doing to someone.
- Something that we are doing to ourselves.

When we add up our combined ages, we have over 100 years of experience. One hundred years is a long time.

One hundred years ago, there were no computers, no cell phones, no televisions, fax machines, automobiles were not common. These are a few examples to show that 100 years of experience is significant.

What we are doing together today is recognizing that each of our lives has importance and that our individual experiences are unique and valuable.

In sharing our experiences about kindness and cruelty, not only will we be developing a deeper understanding of how kindness and cruelty impact our lives, but we will be developing a common technology of language.

Because we have taken the time to seriously reflect on these words, we will have profound insight into what we mean when we use the terms kind, kindness, cruel and cruelty.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which someone was cruel to you:

Someone was cruel to me:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which you experienced someone being cruel to another.

I saw someone being cruel to another:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which you were cruel to someone.

I was cruel to another:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which you were cruel to yourself.

I was cruel to myself:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which you were kind to someone:

I was kind towards someone:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which someone was kind to you.

Someone was kind to me:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which you were kind towards yourself.

I was kind towards myself:

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

Take a few minutes to remember an experience in which you saw someone being kind to another.

I experienced someone being kind towards another.

What were you feeling?

What were you thinking about?

What were you doing?

What were you aware of?

Describe the experience you had.

In reviewing the words kind, kindness, cruel and cruelty, and in sharing our experiences in kindness and cruelty, we come to understand what is meant by the word humane.

What do you mean when you use word humane?

Take a few minutes to write down your definition of the word humane.

A large, empty rectangular box with a white background, intended for the student to write their definition of the word 'humane'. The box is centered on the page and is surrounded by a light green border.

Here is a dictionary definition of the word humane:

Dictionary: **humane** (hyū-mān')

adj.

1. Characterized by kindness, mercy, or compassion: *a humane judge.*
2. Marked by an emphasis on humanistic values and concerns: *a humane education.*

[Middle English *humain*, human. See [human](#).]

humanely hu·mane'ly *adv.*

humaneness hu·mane'ness *n.*

SYNONYMS *humane, compassionate, humanitarian, merciful.* These adjectives mean marked or motivated by concern with the alleviation of suffering: *a humane physician; compassionate toward impoverished people; released the prisoner for humanitarian reasons; is merciful to the repentant.*

Thesaurus: **humane**

adjective

Concerned with human welfare and the alleviation of suffering: [charitable](#), [compassionate](#), [human](#), [humanitarian](#), [merciful](#). See [attitude/good attitude/bad attitude/neutral attitude](#), [kind/cruel](#).

We may have different perceptions about what it means to be humane, we can agree that being humane or humaneness is experienced and this experience is composed of thoughts, feelings, actions and awareness, directed towards an object.

How humane are you?

1. I experience myself being humane towards another.

Never Seldom Occasionally Often Regularly Always

2. I experience someone being humane to me.

Never Seldom Occasionally Often Regularly Always

3. I experience someone being humane to another.

Never Seldom Occasionally Often Regularly Always

4. I experience someone being humane towards myself.

Never Seldom Occasionally Often Regularly Always

5. How humane or inhumane are you?

(humane)+8 +7 +6 +5 +4 +3 +2 +1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 (inhumane)

Humaneness is a muscle;
the more we exercise our awareness of humaneness in our lives,
the more we are motivated and empowered to be kind towards
another and ourselves, and to be aware how cruelty impacts our
lives as individuals, families and communities.

Dictionary: empathy (ĕm'pā-thē)

n.

1. Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives. See synonyms at [pity](#).
2. The attribution of one's own feelings to an object.

[EN-² + -PATHY (translation of German *Einführung*).]

Thesaurus: empathy

noun

1. Sympathetic, sad concern for someone in misfortune: [commiseration](#), [compassion](#), [condolence](#), [pity](#), [sympathy](#). See [pity](#).
2. A very close understanding between persons: [sympathy](#). See [connect](#), [love/hatred](#), [understand/misunderstand](#).

human^e

The energy in humane = empathy

Witnessing Kindness

There are many people who believe that there is not enough kindness in the world. In actual fact, there is not enough awareness of kindness in the world.

An act of kindness has a multiplication effect. I call this synergy the monkey-see monkey-do syndrome. When an act of kindness is witnessed, the witness is more inclined to carry out an act of kindness. This is kindness's amazing potential and power.

A simple example would be when someone holds a door open for us at the mall, we are naturally inclined to follow suit and hold the door open for the person behind us, or be kind towards another at another time.

Being aware of experiences of kindness helps to keep one's awareness open to the witnessing of acts of kindness. Sometimes we are so involved with our own thoughts and experiences that we may not notice that, for example, someone has opened a door for us or another person for that matter.

When we become aware of how an act of kindness has the amazing potential to be copied by someone who simply witnesses an act of kindness, we develop a deep appreciation of how an act of kindness benefits both the receiver and giver. For, in being kind towards another, we are also witnessing an act of kindness which motivates us towards more acts of kindness.

When we witness acts of kindness towards others, we are motivated to be kind ourselves. In the above experience, I was motivated to help, and I did, in raking leaves for the elderly couple.

There is a certain energy that is evoked when we witness genuine kindness towards another. The energy comes spontaneously, and provides the will to be kind, allowing us to tap into and use the goodness that is within all humans.

We can see many examples of how we can help others, just by observing or witnessing acts of kindness towards another. But it does not always have to be first-hand experience that uplifts us to be kind. We may witness or experience kindness towards another in a newspaper item, TV news broadcast or on the radio.

Although the vicarious experience of kindness towards another is motivating, somehow when we experience these acts first-hand, we are more deeply touched. For this reason, it is positive and useful to be open to or aware of people being kind to another.

Receiving Kindness

I have titled this chapter "Receiving Kindness," because in actual fact when someone is kind to us, we are really receiving the kindness. It is not merely that someone is being kind to us, there has to be acknowledgement or awareness that someone was or is kind to us for the kindness to be truly appreciated.

Sometimes kindness is perceived as if it were poisoned candy. Questions may come up such as, "Why is this person being kind to me?" or "Is there an ulterior motive?"

It is sad to note that there are unscrupulous people in the world who use "kindness" as a means to "get something." Genuine kindness is an act that benefits the receiver, and the giver, who is not looking for a return on his or her investment of kindness. Most people, however, when they give an act of kindness, are sincere.

Some individuals have a hard time accepting a compliment. They may feel embarrassed or awkward. For example, Mary tells Susan that she loves what Susan has done with her hair. Susan then qualifies this kindness, by saying something like, "my hair is just a mess, I haven't done anything to it in ages." In her case, "ages" means she still has to go to her weekly appointment at the beauty parlor. In actual fact however, Susan is not fully appreciating Mary's kind compliment, and as such, is not reaping the full benefits of Mary's generosity.

It takes openness and a willingness to receive kindness and to delight in its bounty. The following exercise will help you to remember and reflect upon an experience in which someone was kind to you.

When we allow people to be kind to us, we are also providing the giver an opportunity to exercise her or his innate goodness

I think of kindness as a spiritual muscle. The more kindness is used, the stronger it becomes. Similarly, when we accept the kindness of others, we also strengthen our ability to receive.

It is sad to note that some suffering in the world results from people not being able to ask for and receive help. I am always amazed that people often want to help others, and will go to great lengths to lend a hand.

Often we hear stories of great acts of kindness in the media. Usually, these stories involve a disaster or trauma and thus, our attention is captivated. However, the small, common, everyday acts of kindness in our lives improve the general quality of our lives and help us feel better about ourselves and the world in which we live.

In receiving kindness, or letting another person be kind towards us, we are in our own way developing awareness of the utmost value that kindness brings.

Giving Kindness

Kindness or being kind are actions which benefit another and/or oneself. A gentle encouraging word spoken, petting your cat or dog, sharing a pleasant afternoon with a family member, making a donation to a charitable society are all different ways in which we allow kindness into our lives.

Sometimes people consider kindness as a 'giving' but also a 'giving in'. When we are genuinely kind and promoting benefits for another and/or oneself there is a feeling of effortlessness and a sense of goodwill.

However, if our kindness is accompanied by a feeling of loss or 'giving in', our kindness loses its spontaneity and we feel we must or ought to or should be kind. When this happens we can ask ourselves: "Do I really want to be kind?" Maybe at that time, you don't. Maybe you do not have the energy or resources to be kind at the time. Being kind involves a certain realism about what one can do easily or comfortably.

Kindness is an action which benefits another and/or oneself. However, sometimes seemingly 'kind' acts can be cruel. For example, individuals who feed their dogs chocolates, which temporarily produce a tasty benefit, do their pets no true service particularly if their pets are overweight and in danger of becoming diabetic. Also, chocolates can be quite toxic to dogs.

Kindness is not 'wimpish' behaviour. Being kind does not mean as, one person said to me, "having tire tracks all across your face!" Kindness is consideration of another and oneself at the same time. Kindness involves awareness of oneself, others, and of opportunities to be kind.

People usually do not talk about the kindness that they gave as a matter of politeness and charity. However in this course, we can learn much through the sharing of experiences in which we have been kind towards another.

In thinking about and reflecting upon experiences in which we have been kind to another, enables us to also think and reflect upon the various motivations and awarenesses that urge to carry out kind acts.

Kindness is a gift. Maimonides was a medieval Jewish philosopher, doctor, scholar and legalist. He listed eight ascending levels of giving to the poor. Other people, such as Julie Salamon and Dr. Paul T.P. Wong have developed, respectively, The Ladder of Charity and the Ladder of generosity.

Here is a Spectrum of Kindness based on degrees of awareness in a kind act.

- * 1. Knowing that kindness is required, but refusing to act
- * 2. Kindness without knowing or being aware that one was kind
- * 3. Kindness because one was asked to give
- * 4. Reluctant kindness
- * 5. Kindness expecting a return
- * 6. Kindness out of guilt

- * 7. Kindness without expecting a return
- * 8. Proactive kindness

In knowing that a kindness is required and refusing to act on this impulse, there is, nevertheless, a miniscule amount of awareness of kindness. But this kindness is only a potential that is not actualized.

Sometimes we can be kind without knowing that we have been kind. Once, my mom told me that she always appreciated the kindness I gave her when she was ill. I was unaware of how much my support had meant to her. I was just being a son.

If we are asked to give, then we are unaware of the opportunity to give. Once we become aware of the opportunity to be kind, we can be reluctantly kind, or kind out of guilt, or kind either expecting a return or not expecting a return, or we can be proactively kind.

From time to time, we are presented with a situation where we are begrudgingly or reluctantly kind, as in the case of a panhandler asking for spare change.

When kindness is given to create shame in the receiver, or the kindness is given to impress or receive recognition, then these kindnesses are given with an expectation of some return. An honest self-appraisal will show that we can also be kind out of guilt. There is the motivation to give a gift of kindness, but this impulse is tempered by a degree of self-interest.

Kindness without expecting a return offers a greater awareness of the true value of kindness and its potential.

Proactive kindness is best described as using one's generosity in such a way that the receiver does not have to ask for help at the present time or in the future.

Kindness can be given or activated in a number of ways, but first there has to be awareness that a kindness can be given. Once this awareness is known to the giver, he or she can decide to exercise his or her right to be kind.

Being Kind to Oneself

Giving the gift of kindness to oneself is a true gift of self. Sometimes we can forget that the individual can be an object of her or his own experience. This is akin to counting the number of people in a room and forgetting to include oneself in the count.

Treating oneself with the highest degree of respect that one affords a best friend speaks to the importance of considering oneself as one's own best friend. The way we treat ourselves is often a good way to measure how we will and do treat others.

Kindness is a gift that benefits the receiver and the giver. Kindness is not self-indulgence. When an individual is self-indulgent he or she cannot resist the gratification of whims and desires. Just because something "feels" good, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is good. Self-indulgence means that either the receiver or the giver is not getting full benefit from the act.

In the words of psychotherapist Claudia H. Christian, "self-kindness is applying a generous and warm heart toward yourself to create sympathy and understanding from yourself, for yourself."

In the same way that we can be kind in our consideration of other people, we can also be kind to ourselves.

Genuine self-kindness originates in self-esteem that is based on the positive and negative beliefs one has about being valuable or capable. I can say to myself, "I am worthy enough for me to be kind to myself." However, if these notions of self-worth are not enriched by healthy self-respect, then kindness to oneself can morph into self-indulgence. Self-respect leads us to say for example, "I don't really need to have that third piece of delicious cake."

A review of the of the Spectrum of Kindness shows that there can be situations when we are aware of the need to be kind to ourselves, and refuse to heed that awareness.

Sometimes we can be kind to ourselves without appreciating the full awareness of our own power to be self-kind.

When we are asked to reflect and realize that we can be more kind to ourselves, this is kindness resulting from our being asked to give (kindness to ourselves.) Sometimes we can reluctantly oblige.

Being genuinely kind to oneself does not stem from an expectation of a return. That return can be in terms of being more balanced, calmer, more at peace with oneself. If we try to achieve more balance, calmness and peace through being kind to ourselves, then what happens if we do not find the balance, calm and tranquility that we desire? We lose hope and unfortunately can dismiss the inherent benefit in self-kindness. What is this benefit? Simply stated, Love.

At other times, we can be kind to ourselves out of guilt. I have heard people, and myself, say "I should be more kind to myself. Kindness is a set of awarenesses, thoughts, feelings and

actions that benefits the receiver and the giver. Feeling that one has to be kind to oneself does not open up the well-spring of generosity of spirit inherent in all humans.

Sometimes we can be kind to ourselves without expecting a return. This is where we can find the true difference between self-indulgence and being kind to oneself.

When we are proactively self-kind, we realize that, for example, a certain habit and behavior is self-destructive, and we choose to be kind to ourselves in gradually changing the habit or behavior.

This chapter on being kind to oneself ends this section on Kindness. We looked at witnessing, receiving and giving kindness in our relations with others and ourselves.

In the introductory chapter of this course, entitled, How this Course Works, you were asked to list words that resonate with your personal understanding of the concepts Kind and Kindness.

Witnessing Cruelty

The renowned inventor, thinker and architect, R. Buckminster Fuller, once said in his seminal text, *Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking*, that "a triangle is a triangle regardless of size." In a previous section of this course, we became aware of the fact that a kindness, no matter the size, is valuable for both the receiver and giver.

When we are confronted with cruelty, it is the cruelty that is brutal or merciless that truly catches our attention. Yet, sometimes cruelty resulting from malice, spite, unkindness, meanness, nastiness or vindictiveness seems to be somehow less cruel, as if this form of cruelty is simply a part of human nature.

Genuine kindness is an action that benefits both the receiver and the giver. However, with cruelty there is no benefit for either the receiver or the giver. Although one may find temporary pleasure or delight in making an unkind remark, all cruelty, regardless of its magnitude, lowers the self-esteem and self-respect of the giver and the receiver.

We witness cruelty every day when we watch TV, listen to or view the news, or read a newspaper. This vicarious experience of cruelty tends to deaden the senses to the simpler forms of cruelty that exist in our daily lives, cruelty that comes with the nasty comment, a sneer, a look or other form, of behavior that is meant to cause discomfort or physical and psychological pain.

We can be thoroughly shocked when we witness a barbaric act or cruelty first hand. Yet oddly enough, we can witness murders, rape, torture and other horrible acts on television, in films or in video games and feel that they are not real and as such have little effect on our being.

However, it has been recognized that the subconscious mind does not easily distinguish between imagined and real experiences. In September 1999, the US Senate Committee on the Judiciary reported that by the age of 18, an American child will have seen 16,000 simulated acts of murder and 200,000 acts of violence.

The Academy of Pediatrics says "More than one thousand scientific studies and reviews conclude that significant exposure to media violence increases the risk of aggressive behavior in certain children, desensitizes them to violence and makes them believe that the world is a 'meaner and scarier' place than it is."

Dr. Joanne Cantor notes in her paper, "The Psychological Effects of Media Violence on Children and Adolescents" that "two independently conducted studies of adults' retrospective reports of having been frightened by a television show or movie demonstrate that the presence of vivid, detailed memories of enduring media-induced fear is nearly universal."

In the same way that kindness can be viewed as a spectrum based on degrees of awareness in a kind act, Cruelty can also be understood as a spectrum, ranging from unintentional to intentional cruelty.

Here is a Spectrum of Cruelty based on degrees of awareness in a cruel act.

- * 1. Cruelty resulting from ignorance
- * 2. Cruelty resulting from pain
- * 3. Cruelty resulting from illness
- * 4. Cruelty based in knowledge
- * 5. Intentional cruelty
- * 6. Premeditated cruelty
- * 7. Satiating Cruelty
- * 8. Encouraging cruelty

At one end of the spectrum there is cruelty resulting from ignorance. In this case the individual who commits the cruel act is unaware that the act is cruel. Every year tragically, many dogs suffer from heat prostration and death due to being left in hot cars during the summer months. The owners are unaware that a dog does not perspire and can only cool himself down through panting.

The next level of the spectrum is cruelty resulting from pain. Sometimes when a person is experiencing physical or mental pain, she or he cannot help from acting out in a cruel way. The act is a reaction to pain. For example, it is not uncommon to hear about loving couples, who in the middle of a heated argument have said most unkind and even cruel things to each other. If they were in their "right" minds, they would never be so hurtful.

Moving along the spectrum, there is cruelty resulting from illness. Sometimes, if one is not physically, emotionally or spiritually well, he or she can be cruel not stemming from intention but rather as a response to the illness.

Intentional cruelty is the next level of the spectrum. This is where a person knows that such and such an act is cruel but nevertheless carries out the act.

Moving on from intentional cruelty is pre-meditated cruelty where an individual plans and orchestrates a particular cruel act.

At next level in the spectrum of cruelty is what can be called satiating cruelty. This is where someone delights in the suffering of others, and the infliction of pain. Within satiating cruelty is the concept of Schadenfreude, which is a German term, meaning pleasure taken from someone else's misfortune, or shameful joy.

At the end of the cruelty spectrum is where an individual encourages and baits another to be cruel or to delight in a cruel act being carried out.

Receiving Cruelty

When someone is cruel towards us personally, the hurt can be devastating, particularly when we have done nothing to deserve the unkindness or cruelty. We may even ask, why are people cruel?

There is a considerable body of research that shows how ordinary people can be easily recruited to engage in harmful, sadistic behaviors against another. Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram demonstrated that the majority of ordinary American citizens who participated in a study blindly obeyed an authority figure in administering what they believed to be painful, even lethal shocks to a stranger.

Albert Bandura, also at Yale University, revealed that intelligent research participants were willing to give increasingly higher levels of shock to other college students when their victims had been labeled by a research assistant as "seeming like animals."

In another study, by Philip G. Zimbardo, it was shown that situational forces can distort individual values. Average college students recruited to role-play prison guards became their roles in a matter of days, behaving with increasing or escalating violence toward their prisoners who were simply other college students.¹

However, cruelty towards another essentially involves the cruel person lacking awareness or acceptance of the other's uniqueness of being, and the right to be free from cruelty. In a sense the cruel act involves the cruel person deriving a personal gain such as increased prestige in his or her mind, or attempting to have personal control over the other.

Those who have been bullied, abused, treated inhumanely or with malicious intent know all too well how any cruelty towards another human being is a form of soul murder. The very vital essence of our humanness is somehow robbed when we are subjected to cruelty. But the same loss is also experienced in the person who commits a cruel act. This loss can be expressed in terms of a decline in empathy, that is the ability to identify with and understand another's situation, feelings and motives.

The abused person often suffers from a lack of self-esteem, and the ability to empathize with himself and the experienced cruelty. He blames himself for what has happened. But with good fortune, therapy and maturation he can come to see how he was the victim in the cruelty he experienced.

Sadly and all too frequently, the abused person turns to alcohol, drugs or some other form of addiction or self-destructive behavior that helps him or her to bury the pain of the experience and to try to reclaim the humanness lost when he or she was treated cruelly.

As I have said previously, cruelty is cruelty regardless of its size. The little cruelties we experience also diminish the quality of our lives. While we may not be consciously aware of how a "little" cruelty has affected us, at a subconscious level the impact is being experienced.

For example, when someone treats us rudely, which can be seen as a mild form of inhumaneness or "little" cruelty, we can often slough the behavior off as simply uncivilized

behavior –depending on the mood we are in and our state of mind. At other times, however, shedding the same rude experience can be difficult to do immediately and we have to work through the experience and deal with the ensuing anger, which is actually repressed fear that we are not deemed worthy of humane respect and decency.

Giving Cruelty

Many people believe that they have never been cruel, but will gladly tell you about how cruel other people can be. We have examples of barbarians, dictators, tyrants and others who have shown great cruelty towards others. Almost daily we read about, see on the TV, or hear on the radio how someone was brutally murdered or beaten up or sexually assaulted or raped.

In the main, most people are not murderers, savage bullies or sadistic monsters. However, an honest self-appraisal will reveal that there have been times when we could have been more kind or less cruel.

We generally loathe to think honestly about the dark side of human nature that exists in most, if not all, humans. Oddly enough, though, we delight in the many TV shows and novels that go into great detail about how people can be cruel towards each other. We are afraid to think that, perhaps, each one of us has a cruel streak, whether or not it is exercised. But in truth, all humans have the capacity to be cruel in the same way that all humans have the capacity to be kind and generous in spirit

Often the cruelty we carry out is verbal and takes the form of unkind words spoken, passive aggressive behavior, "teasing," mean-spiritedness and out and out hostility. If we are truthful about how we have been or can be cruel, we come to a realization that our ability to be kind can be sometimes over-powered by our ability to be cruel.

When we are cruel towards another, often the cruelty stems from feelings of retaliation, revenge, or wanting to "get even." Often our cruelty is a reaction to a situation or event that forces us to act out without thought or consideration of the other person's state of mind or being at the time.

Abject cruelty always is an attempt to exercise power over another. Cruelty is not always physically violent but can be verbal as in a sarcastic remark or a put-down. The sneer or "look" can be equally cruel. Ultimately however, cruelty stems from fear, fear that a person has something that one doesn't have. This "something" can be physical or non-physical such as a personality trait, talent or ability. Cruelty is always devastating to both the receiver and giver.

I know of this family where the father never bonded with his son, and appeared to hate him. He would constantly tell his son, in one way or another, that he would not amount to much. The son ended up being a junkie, living on the streets, and was never able to finish his schooling beyond a GED, and could not hold down a job. The father missed out on a valuable relationship that he could have had, and the son never received the love that he rightfully deserved just because he was born. When the father died, the son lost all hope of ever being able to have the love of his father. The son's soul had been murdered.

Hatred is another source of cruel motivations and actions. According to Wikipedia.org, "hate or hatred is an emotion of intense revulsion, distaste, enmity, or antipathy for a person, thing, or phenomenon; a desire to avoid, restrict, remove, or destroy its object."

The Dalai Lama has noted that the antidote to hatred in the heart, the source of violence, is tolerance that enables one to refrain from reacting angrily to the harm inflicted by others. Yet sometimes we have to react, for if we did not react, a horrible tragedy will occur. For example, if one looks at the recent world scene, there is the Rwanda massacre, the genocide in the Sudan and the murder of Bosnian Muslims. In each case the world, or world leaders, were not motivated enough to put an end to these killings.

One would hope that after the Second World War, with the extermination of millions of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, thinkers, artists and others, the human race would do everything in its power to prevent this from happening again. But again in the few years after this war, Stalin killed millions of his countrymen and women. This list can go on and on, from WW II to the present time.

In the World today, terrorism has brought cruelty to the forefront. But in the background, there are the more subtle forms of cruelty that many humans participate in, even knowing that the acts are cruel.

For example, there are people who love animals and eat meat. They eat the meat knowing about factory farming and the horrendous conditions the animal has come from. It may even cross their minds, while they are eating, that the animal was raised inhumanely but still keep on eating while reflecting on the chemicals and animal-remains this beast was fed in order to put food on the table. Compassion, sympathy, empathy for these creatures have not been aroused. These people would never beat a dog or kill an animal, but have participated in what can be a very cruel industry. In a sense they have abetted a cruelty.

It is the accumulation of these little "abetting" acts, which on the surface seem to be harmless, that leads to the fact that a very cruel industry can exist. These people were not personally cruel, just cruel enough to participate in a cruel industry.

Another example concerns the pornographic industry, with revenues larger than the combined revenues of professional US football, baseball and basketball franchises, and exceeding the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.

This is an industry that objectifies the human body and in the process, diminishes the sanctity of human sexuality. Often the "actors" in this industry have come from a life of child abuse or severe family dysfunction and suffer from one or multiple addictions. Sadly too, there are, according to one study, 100,000 Web sites offering illegal child pornography.

People, in general, are aware of the proliferation of pornography on the Internet, and the potential harmful effect it can have on the family, leading to pornography addiction and other problems in the home. Yet 25% of all search engine requests, or a total of 68 million pornographic site queries, are made each day.

The people who are requesting, for example, the 116,000 daily peer-to-peer Gnutella "child pornography" requests may not be personally abusing a child but are abetting a cruelty being carried out and supporting an inhumane and destructive industry. ¹

The above are two extreme examples of the conflict that may exist between what we know is right and what we do. A thorough examination of one's relationship with the objects, animals, people and the environment in one's life can lead to greater awareness of how we are cruel, and quite frankly, don't care.

When we are desensitized and not moved by accounts or knowledge of cruelty, through our own apathy and inability to empathize or sympathize, we are shown the limitations of our hearts and minds. These limitations are not related to feelings of anger and disgust that such and such a cruelty can or did occur. This restriction is related to, however, how we feel about ourselves individually. For if one is truly connected in the world, one would see all humans as brothers and sisters as a part of a global family, within a sphere that contains animals, flora, nature, an environment and oneself.

As long as we consider another human to be "The Other," we automatically become "The Other" as well. When we have become "The Other," we also fracture the wholeness of our individual selves, so that within us we create an alien, not to be trusted, aspect of our being.

Once our being is split, we lose the necessary tolerance for otherness, and our ability to deal rationally with our own cruel impulses and those of others. Ultimately, this rupture in human personality can lead to our being cruel to ourselves.

Being Cruel to Oneself

The act of attempting suicide is probably the cruelest thing one can do to oneself. As mentioned previously, many years ago, I created a suicide prevention site for those who are despairing and contemplating suicide. Most people who attempt suicide do not want to die. They simply want relief from the pain they are experiencing and can see no end to their suffering.

Cruelty to oneself, regardless of degree, originates from unexpressed suffering. Some people who wrote me shared that they suffered from various forms of eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia, or were involved with self-harm such as cutting their bodies.

Cruelty to oneself can be a misguided attempt to build self-esteem in being able to endure pain, or can be a means of self-punishment because one feels unworthy, or to simply have the sensation and visual physical proof that one is alive. The roots of these acts stem from a desire to be heard, listened to and treated with humane respect and love. Sadly, these people never learned how to cope with stress or overwhelming feelings. Often, these people have suffered physical and mental abuse as children, and were discouraged from expressing emotions, particularly anger and sadness.

Cruelty to oneself can also take the form of over-eating, smoking, drug taking, the excessive consumption of alcohol, over-exercising, workaholism, reckless driving, pathological gambling, compulsive shopping, excessive risk taking and self-sabotaging behaviors. In each of these situations, the individual has lost the sense that she or he is an individual of unique quality and has become fixated on what they perceive they do not have, whether this may mean money, prestige, "looks," power, intelligence, education, a nurturing relationship or whatever the individual feels is missing in one's life.

While the above examples of cruelty to oneself are physically manifested, many more people suffer from self-defeating and self-criticizing behaviors. This negative self-talking robs the individual of the inherent creativity within their being through emphasizing on past failures, having impossibly high standards, ignoring past accomplishments and successes, or calling oneself names like "stupid," "weak," or "incapable." Frequently these behaviors are learned in childhood where the individual was told repeatedly that he or she was stupid, weak or incapable.

Cruelty to oneself can also take the form of looking to external sources for validation of approval and lying to oneself and others. So often we hear about a battered spouse who endures a violent and destructive relationship because she or he, although most frequently she, is incapable of facing and telling the truth about the situation she is in, and lies to herself and others about the degree of suffering experienced. The lying results from the desire to have external validation which includes the wish to be always well thought of.

Another form of self-cruelty takes the form of denying oneself simple pleasure or delight in the goodness that life does offer because one feels that one is not worthy or that other people are worthier. It is a form of self-punishment that is never fulfilled because life frequently presents opportunities for one to enjoy living. This joy in life may come from the kindness of others, a compliment, a token of affection, the appreciation of nature or simply the company of good friends and family.

Thinking bad of others, gossiping, excessive distrust and doubting, hating and repeatedly finding fault with others are other forms of self-cruelty because they allow the individual to be stuck in negative thought processes that lead to one taking life too seriously. Life is a serious event, but when we take life too seriously, we rob ourselves of the spontaneity and creative intelligence that full living provides.

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