

the
Kindness Handbook
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Contents



Introduction
1

The Foundation
5

The Entry
37

The Expression
75

Closing
167

Bibliography
169

Credits
171

About the Author
173

Introduction



It takes boldness, even audacity, to step out of our habitual patterns and experiment with a quality like kindness — to work with it and see just how it might shift and open up our lives. This book is an invitation to do just that. Kindness can manifest as compassion, as generosity, as paying attention. It can be offered to ourselves, to those whom we know and hold in high regard, to those whom we find difficult, to friends, to strangers, to all of life. For kindness to be more fully realized it needs to be distinguished from being ineffectual or meek. It needs to be infused with wisdom. Kindness needs to be supported by courage and threaded with balance.

Sometimes the practice of kindness brings ready, joyful results. Other times it takes an awful lot from us and is exceptionally hard — but it still feels like the right thing to do. Sometimes the most important recipient of kindness is the one most commonly overlooked — ourselves. Other times forming a dedication to care for others is the single most important thing we can do to experience and abide in our own genuine happiness.

This handbook is a collection of stories, meditation exercises, inspirations, poems, and teachings, all pointing to the power and grace of kindness. There are three main sections: The Foundation, which examines the fundamentals of lovingkindness, compassion, and a truer sense of happiness than many of us experience day to day; The Entry, which explores several different dimensions of love and compassion for ourselves, the oft-hidden ingredient that establishes kindness as a real possibility in our relationships, families, and work in the world; and The Expression, which carries kindness into multifaceted arenas in our lives, looking at how our deepest aspirations and day-to-day realities come together to remake our lives in the midst of ordinary circumstances.

Through its meditations, anecdotes, and readings, this book is designed to be used progressively if you wish, as a guidebook through the wide-ranging landscape of kindness. It can also

simply be opened to any page — what is being presented on that page may help frame a contemplation on what is being presented in your life.

the
Foundation


*The Underpinnings
of Kindness*

As the Buddha said, “Just as the dawn is the forerunner and the first indication of the rising sun, so is right view the forerunner and the first indication of wholesome states.”

Our view of who we are, what we are capable of, what matters in the world, molds our intentions, which in turn mold our actions. How we look at our lives becomes the basis for how we act and how we live and whether our choices are shaped by love and kindness. Transforming our understanding transforms our whole life: our happiness, our degree of connectedness, our freedom. None of these are fixed in the particular externals of who we are; they are held in the universal potential of what we might become.



The Search for Happiness



I have a friend who went to India a while ago, and the day before he was going to fly we had a phone conversation. It turned out he was going with another friend who had made all of the travel arrangements, and this person hadn't realized that for just a little bit more money they could have flown business class instead of economy class, which of course on such a long flight would have been far more comfortable. We were speaking about whether they could manage to change their tickets, if there would be a penalty, and how much nicer it would be to go business class. If they could arrange for the upgrade, they reasoned, they would arrive rested instead of exhausted and unhappy. Right in the

middle of this conversation about moving into business class, my friend said, “I wonder how much it would cost to go first class?”

I know that state of mind so well. As soon as you get into business class, you start thinking about first class. This is how we are conditioned — there is always something else to want, even before we take a moment to appreciate what we already have, or are about to have. The variety of opportunity and circumstance is infinite. We get into a mind state of looking for an upgrade, and another upgrade, and yet another; it can be endless. Living more consciously is about turning around the habit of always wanting more. It is about deconditioning, about getting out of such constricted mind states and discovering a radically different kind of happiness — one that is not so vulnerable, that does not lead to certain dissatisfaction. We need to loosen our grasping and our clinging, and we need to have the courage to step out of our conditioning.

An essential question we might ask ourselves is, “What do I really need right now, in this moment, to be happy?” The world offers us many answers to that question: You need a new car and a new house and a new relationship and . . . But do we really? “What do I lack right now? Does anything need to change in order for me to be happy? What do I really need?” These are powerful questions.