

On Kindness: 3 threads

1) From Genesis 24:

And he (servant of Abraham) said, “O Eternal One, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Abraham: Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’-let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.”

The servant (of Abraham) ran toward her (Rebecca) and said, “Please, let me sip a little water from your jar.” “Drink, my lord,” she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. When she had let him drink his fill, she said, “I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking.” Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

Rabbi Stacy Rigler comments: Kindness first requires that you be considerate, seeing another person, their circumstances, and their need. Rebecca knew that not only the man but also the camels would need water. She also knew that they were too tired to get it themselves, or at least would appreciate the extra effort.

Kindness requires an act of friendliness, an assumption of good will. Rebecca was not startled or offended by the request for water by the stranger. She assumed that he was in need and worked to help.

Finally, kindness requires selflessness and generosity. Rebecca does not want or expect anything in return for her actions. The text does not focus on the exertion required to offer water to the servant and all his camels, nor on how it might have been inconvenient or even dangerous for her.

The Jewish teacher Alan Morinis in his book *Everyday Holiness* explains, Chessed involves acts that sustain the other...In the Jewish view, it is not enough to hold warm thoughts in our heart or to wish each other well. We are meant to offer real sustenance to one another... to qualify as chessed, these actions need to come out of kindness and no other motive.

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/showing-kindness>

2) Chris Eaton and his company Bridge Builders coordinated international service-learning trips for more than 30 years.

Often we resort to increasing the volume, as if that will help us communicate. We shout at those around us thinking if we get louder then they will understand us. However, like my Guatemalan friend who did not understand English, louder just means louder — and more aggressive.

There is a sense of powerlessness when one lacks the skill to communicate with another. I have seen frustration, anger and annoyance. Gradually to evade the sense of powerlessness we begin to remain only with those who speak our “language.”

I came to the realization that I was not applying to my life what I had encouraged others to do when outside of one’s language comfort zone. I had forgotten the power in nonverbal communication. I may not be able to speak your language, but I do have the power to be kind. I do have the power to smile at others, and in doing so I often times diffuse the likely communication issues. I don’t have to know your language to be kind to you.

By choosing to be kind in encounters with others, I retake some power in my life. One thing that transcends culture, transcends the inability to communicate with words, is kindness. Kindness to another does not need to be predicated upon speaking the same language. In fact, kindness is the first step in a communication dance. By choosing to be kind I choose to lean into what connects us as humans. A smile is one of the most powerful tools we have. It is universally understood. In fact, it is power!

Watch people around babies. The infant doesn’t speak my language. We don’t yell at them. We are not even sure what is going on in their infant brain, but we always lean first into kindness (smiles, goofy faces, etc.).

As we head into 2024, I am dreading all the yelling I might do to others, and all the yelling they might do to me. Part of my dread is knowing that my language will not resonate with them, so I need to remember my kindness will. No matter what your party affiliation, no matter your tribe, no matter your certainty, always lean into kindness as it can exist between us before the language confusion becomes known.

Read the full article here: https://edition.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?artguid=089c4807-35e8-4d6f-8711-9c51c214af77&appcode=TAM192&eguid=286407a6-f72c-4c03-a12d-80339695ddad&pnum=30

3) A family has 1 goal: to get back their son who vanished when Hamas attacked Israel

STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

Of the many hostages Hamas is holding in Gaza, one in particular is on the mind of someone I know in the United States. She told me about it before I left home to come to Israel.

EDNA FRIEDBERG: So my name is Edna Friedberg. I am your neighbor from across the street. I am a Midwestern American Jew.

INSKEEP: She grew up in Indiana and now lives in Washington, D.C.

FRIEDBERG: And just having a hard time right now.

INSKEEP: Edna Friedberg has many friends and relatives who live in Israel, and that extended group includes the family of an 18-year-old, Ofir Engel. His family told her that Hamas took Ofir hostage this month.

FRIEDBERG: I hurt for them, and so I can't stop talking about it.

INSKEEP: She even talked about it at her son's soccer game.

FRIEDBERG: I heard some dads from the opposing team next to me a few feet away with their dogs talking about Israel and Gaza, and one of them was saying, you know, well, what do you expect? Israel has been, you know, blockading Gaza for 15 years. I'm thinking in my head, buddy, it's actually 16, you know? Like, know your facts - just justifying what had happened. And I lost it. I went over, and I started screaming at him really loud. I was not at my best self. I didn't like feeling that way. I didn't want to be eaten by anger.

INSKEEP: And then she thought of the hostage, Ofir.

FRIEDBERG: I pulled up one of the photos that his uncle had sent me, and I went over to the dad, who had been the most vitriolic, and I said, I'm really sorry for cursing at you. May I show you something? I want to show you a picture of this boy. We both have high school students out here on the soccer field, and tomorrow's his birthday, and his family doesn't know where he is. And I just would like you to look at him. And the guy told me, actually, that his family is Lebanese. And he started to cry, and I started to cry. And we actually hugged each other.

Listen to the interview here: <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/30/1209377191/family-has-1-goal-to-get-back-their-son-who-vanished-when-hamas-attacked-israel>