

## **Kindness: A Choice**

(Original)

*Maya Amaravathi Sarkar*

*(Age 14, India)*

*Kodaikanal International School*

Kindness: a word that evokes different images in peoples' minds. In mine, an unpleasant memory from my early years. I remember my friend bullying a classmate of mine, taking off his glasses and throwing it against a wall. She pushed him to the wall and walked away. I looked down, too afraid to meet the boy's eyes. More than afraid, I felt ashamed. Ashamed to call this girl my friend. I watched the boy pick up his glasses and walk towards our classroom.

"Are you okay?" I asked, sympathetically.

"Yeah," he replied, "I'm...fine. Don't worry about it. I don't really care what she does to me." He walked away before I could say "I do".

I wanted him to know that he was not alone. It had only been a month since he joined the school, and he was already having a tough time.

Later, I asked her why she bullied that boy, and she shrugged like it was no big deal. I guess she didn't realize that, just like one small act of kindness goes a long way, one rude or mean gesture can also have a lasting impact. I grew increasingly distant to this 'friend', and with this, the boy became one of my closest friends, whom I could trust with anything.

My internal response to this incident, and many others I witnessed, intrigued me and provoked much thought. What can we do to make society a better place? I realised what many have come to understand: kindness is like a ripple. One small act creates more, causing a community to erupt with smiles, laughter, and compassion. I want to be the stone thrown into the water, causing that kind of ripple.

Likewise, bullying is also a ripple, where people impact others with their own negative experiences. To stop these ripples from expanding, I need to cause an even stronger and more influential ripple of kindness within the community.

For a long time I kept questioning myself; why would someone fuel hatred and disrespect instead of friendship and kindness? I realized that everyone has a choice to be

who they want. They could bully and be the cause of someone's pain. They could also choose to watch and do nothing while someone is suffering. Alternatively, they could be the person who stops this action and breaks the cycle. They could resist the strong pull towards the 'darkside', and choose to make other's lives brighter, even if difficult and inconvenient. Going the extra mile to do something for others is rewarding in itself. For me, this decision was easy and I chose to be the person who helps others, though I sometimes end up being a helpless witness.

To be completely honest, being kind is often exhausting. When the world seems to be against me, I get bitter and wonder what use it is to be nice to anyone. I lose interest in making others' days brighter, and focus on my own dark and cloudy day. I have found that, though I am kind to someone, they may never return the favour. I now realize I shouldn't expect something in return. When someone shows kindness, it should be from the heart, knowing that it may not come back to them. The real pleasure is the feeling of warmth after helping someone.

However, it takes will-power and strength to be kind. I find myself growing tired and cranky when under stress, making it harder to be kind to somebody. That is why it takes commitment to continue the chain of kindness, to ensure that the cycle of spite is not perpetuated. I feel, to make a real impact through kindness, I must create a like-minded group that promotes deliberate acts of kindness wherever possible. We would support each other, to prevent the feeling of isolation in an endeavor of kindness, to remove the sting when kindness is met with viciousness, and to help each other remain constant in kindness. It is this consistency that makes a difference; a conscious choice to be the ray of sunshine in a dark cavern, and illuminate it. Only then can we see the impact of our actions.