

Helpfulness

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A person is not made up of one characteristic that defines his entire being; rather, he is shaped by the complex mix of his influences and surroundings. Society takes this into account when judging what makes a man. We strive to emphasize the importance of looking past what the eyes see externally to that which the heart understands intuitively. As one gets to know a person on an individual level, he can learn about each of the characteristics, strengths and challenges which combine to make up said person. I firmly believe that helpfulness is a way of life which truly encompasses one's entire being and personality. The virtue of helpfulness has helped me find and define myself as someone who is caring, eager to assist others, and committed to making the world a better place.

I grew up in an Orthodox Jewish household and community, where moral and ethics are emphasized in all aspects of daily life. I have always been told that every choice I make should be purposeful and beneficial to both myself and others. A Jewish saying that has added tremendous meaning to my life is "Say little and do much." The meaning of this saying is that we should perform acts for others happily and without hesitation. I was raised to focus on what I can do for others and how this ultimately benefits myself as well. This attitude requires a constant awareness of what is going on around me and how I can help in any particular situation. This includes living a life of "thank you", "how can I help," and "I would love to do that."

One of the many life lessons I have learned from my parents was taught one night after a family dinner. I was sitting on the couch and turned to my parents to ask if they needed any help. The response I received has stayed with me until today. My father replied wisely, saying, "it is not 'do you need help,' rather the question should be, 'how can I help.'" There is a very important distinction between these two ideas. Asking "How can I help" shows that you are

present, ready, and happy to do whatever needs to be done, instead of giving off the impression that you are only asking to be polite. I have learned that the virtue of helpfulness is not only about being polite, but that a real desire to help others must come from within. When a person truly wants to help those around him, it is reflected in his language and actions. A person's focus should be on putting others first, and doing so in a way which makes them comfortable.

I have had many personal experiences with people who need a tremendous amount of help and constantly have to ask for it. Instead of putting them in the position of requesting help, I try to be aware of what I can do to help before the person needs to ask. My house is accessible due to the fact that I have a sister with Cerebral Palsy and my maternal and paternal grandfathers lived with my family for seven years and seven months, respectively. Due to my close connection with individuals needing assistance, I know they can often feel uncomfortable asking for assistance with tasks I can accomplish easily and in a timely manner. When I offer my assistance, instead of waiting to be asked or watching someone in need struggle, it makes the giver and the taker calmer and more comfortable with their respective positions.

Because of Aristotle's belief that "moral goodness is a result of habit," I have worked on incorporating the virtue of helpfulness into every day tasks. A New York Times article by Tara Parker-Pope from July 2018 explains the power positive people can have on others. The way exercise and a healthy diet impact one's life, surrounding oneself with the right people can do the same. I strive to be the reason someone believes in the goodness of humanity. I aim to not only ease the burden of others, but to do so on time and with a smile. This shows the other person that he/she is a true priority and helping him/her is a top priority to me.

Last year I spent my gap year abroad in a foreign country. Being so far away from home meant that I spent a lot of time as a guest in other people's homes. While doing so, I always made sure being helpful was my top priority. When a person goes out of his way to make you comfortable, the kindness must be returned. Helping out with washing the dishes, clearing the table, or even playing games with the children so the host could take care of other tasks were ways I tried to help alleviate some of the host's stress. In some households, my offer to help out was gladly accepted. I would chop the vegetables, sweep the floor, or help serve the food. This was enjoyable for me because I felt that I was able to contribute in some small way to all the effort that went into my stay. Other times, I was reassured that everything was taken care of and that I could relax. But how could I relax knowing I was being of no help? I had to realize that for some people, it would have been a burden for me to help because I did not know their kitchen or the way they typically ran their household. The balance between being helpful and being a burden was an ever changing line that depended on each place I went. I use helping out with household tasks as a way to express my gratitude, and show that although I may be the guest, both sides are contributing to the relationship.

One challenge with attempting to be as helpful as possible is the giver's time "lost" to someone else's task. I overcome this challenge by recognizing that time spent helping someone else is not time lost, even if it means I have less time to do something I previously wanted to accomplish. Helping others is a task on my list of things to accomplish, so I see helpfulness as shifting my time management, not a waste of time. I have been able to do this by making my schedule as flexible as possible every day so I know I can spend time helping people. By having my schedule be a bit more flexible, I know I will still be able to accomplish what I want for the

day and included in this is helping others. This perspective has taken time to develop and is easier preached than practiced but because I am so passionate about cultivating this virtue and its positive effects, I have grown to see it as only good.

We spend our lives with the goal and mindset on constantly improving ourselves. Some people only strive to materially increase their wealth, but I believe good virtues far outweigh any material sustenance. Once a person shifts his focus to seeing virtues as important as money, he will start craving personal accomplishments as much as business accomplishments. Edith Hall explains this in an article in the Wall Street Journal Aristotle's guide to a life of happiness. Real happiness, he believes, "comes from a continuous effort to become the best possible version of yourself". Each interaction we have is an opportunity to change the lives of those around us, which will in turn change and shape the people we become. Our "to-do" lists are privileges, and we must include others in the activities we are able to perform. With this attitude, people will come to recognize that by helping others, we are truly helping ourselves. As Henry David Thoreau says "It is not enough to be busy. The question is: what are we busy about?".

I am proud of how far I have come in my pursuit of the virtue of helpfulness. There is always room for improvement and I know I will make mistakes, but I know that this is the path I strive to continue on and to build.

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