

## Giving: A Formula for Joy

Close your eyes for a moment and recall a time when you gave someone a wonderful gift. Do you remember the excitement and anticipation you felt just before they received it? Remember the feelings of joy and exhilaration when you witnessed their reaction? Who was more elated—the person you gave the gift to, or you? When you think about it, the experience of giving is many times richer than receiving. And the beautiful paradox is, the more you give, the more you receive.

When Oprah Winfrey orchestrated her Christmas Kindness Tour to children in South Africa in 2002, the joy overwhelmed her. She said it was one of her greatest experiences. Not only did she enrich her life and the lives of the children in South Africa, but once the show aired, hundreds of thousands of viewers were moved by her generosity, and inspired to pay it forward.

### Small Gestures = Great Kindness

If you're wealthy and can afford to give to worthy causes, you are among the very fortunate. If you are still getting to that place but want to give to your community, there are countless other ways to contribute.



A smile, a loving touch or an acknowledgement of the unique qualities in another, are simple gestures that lift spirits. If you want to do more, how about starting a non-profit organization, volunteering your time and talents, or organizing a “random acts of kindness” group, such as the Kindness Crew based in Vancouver, BC? Charitable organizations are always looking for volunteers. You could be a Big Sister or Brother, or spend time with the elderly or terminally ill. If you love animals, your local S.P.C.A. or one of the many wildlife preservation associations are good places to shop for meaningful work. There are limitless options that require nothing more than a willingness to open your heart and extend yourself.

### Enhanced Health and a Peaceful Mind

Besides deriving a deep sense of personal satisfaction, research indicates that performing acts of kindness provide significant health benefits. One of the most compelling studies of altruism was conducted by Allan Luks, author of *The Healing Power of Doing Good: The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others*.

After performing kind acts, volunteers in Luk’s study reported feelings of euphoria, followed by longer periods of calm. This feeling that Luk calls the “helper’s high,” signals the release of endorphins. Further studies found that volunteers’ stress-related problems decreased after performing acts of kindness. Luk created a list of “ills that helping helps,” which includes obesity, insomnia, stomach acid, headaches, backaches, colds and arthritis. In addition, feelings of depression and hostility diminished while the efficacy of pain control and recovery from illness increased.

Other studies done by renowned physicians Dr. Dean Ornish, author of *Dr. Dean Ornish’s Program for Reversing Heart Disease* and Dr. Paul Ka’ikena Pearsall, author of *The Pleasure Prescription*, support the immense health benefits of connection, giving, kindness and tenderness.

### It All Adds Up

Giving creates a ripple effect, touching the lives of others in more ways than we can imagine. In fact, merely witnessing acts of kindness influences the observer. In 1970 an eminent professor of psychology, David

McClelland, conducted research on how people could improve their immune systems. As part of his research protocol he showed movies of Mother Teresa helping babies, then measured immunoglobulin A (IgA), an antibacterial and antiviral class of antibodies, in viewers' saliva. McClelland not only found an increase in IgA, but participants reported feeling motivated to connect with and help others.

Clearly, giving is a natural extension of our connection to humanity. Why not commit to altruism as a way of life? Habitual generosity is not only crucial to ward off feelings of alienation and open the heart— it's an essential ingredient for a vibrant, healthy life.