

## TABLE FOR TWO

# MINDFULNESS REMINDERS

By Dr. Linda Miles

Excerpt from "Change Your Story, Change Your Brain for Better Relationships"

Here are 10 basic steps for cultivating more loving kindness in your own life and, consequently, in the world that surrounds you. Remember that you—and you alone—have the power, light, and love to unleash *the best of you*.

### 1. Breathe.

Breathe consciously and with focus. Remember the breathing exercises throughout this book. With every inhaling breath, think: *be*. With every exhaling breath, think: *calm*.

### 2. Practice Gratitude.

You won't be able to count the benefits of gratitude even if you used all of your fingers and toes; happily, there are too many. People who take the time to notice and ruminate on the people and things they are grateful for are far more likely to enjoy a significantly improved immune system, more life satisfaction, better sleep, a greater ease in exhibiting compassion and kindness, and experience more positivity in general.

### 3. Focus on Kindness.

Connection is in our nature. A Harvard University study led by David Eagleman revealed that infants less than a year old!—already recognize and value acts of kindness.

The researchers showed babies a puppet show featuring a duck and two bears. The storyline follows the duck as it tries to pry open a box of toys. One of the bears helps. The other bear throws its body on the container so that the other bear and duck cannot upon it and retrieve the toys. The researchers then asked the babies to pick the bear that they wanted to play with. The majority of the babies picked the kind, helpful bear. They remembered that bear's compassion!

The same value is just as powerful on the other end of the spectrum. Lisa Genova's study on Alzheimer's shows that elders suffering from this disease begin to forget what people tell them—but the *last* thing that they forget is how people make them feel.

The more you look for kindness, the more you'll see it. The more you give of it, the more kindness returns to you.

### 4. Practice Forgiveness.

Forgiveness means letting go of the idea that you can change the past. Pay attention to when you slip into the trap of dwelling in the past or worrying over future scenarios. Redirect your attention to the present moment. *Healthy guilt* is about acknowledging a mistake and committing to do something different, something better in the future.

*Toxic shame* is when you put yourself down, insulting and labelling yourself with labels like *loser* and *stupid* and *worthless*. Toxic shame is like a hot potato, too; the tendency is to want to throw it at someone else by blaming them. Strike when the iron is cold; after you have calmed down, you can be proactive instead of reactive.

### 5. Practice Self-Compassion.

When the going gets tough, be your own best friend. Researchers Christopher Germer of Harvard and Kristin Neff of the University of Texas have revealed the benefits of talking to yourself as you would to a friend. This approach helps you overcome mistakes more easily and makes problem-solving a far more effective process. Invert the Golden Rule: treat yourself as you would treat your best friend: be kind and patient and loving.

### 6. Label the Negativity.

Label negativity! Remember, it's not about labeling yourself. It's about labeling your thoughts. Recognize and pinpoint which feeling or belief is negative and toxic. Catch it in the sea of your thoughts, reel it in, and then hurl it far away beyond the horizon. Purge the water, cleanse your mind, and let it be pure once more.

### 7. Let Go of Anger.

This ties in closely with the practice of forgiveness. Holding on to anger is like drinking poison and waiting for someone else to die. Your body responds to the horror movie in your mind by secreting adrenaline and cortisol that make your body feel tense and cloud your mind. Notice your tension, stress, and unhappiness. Remind yourself: *That was then. This is now.*

You can take a position about how you want to handle such a situation when it crops up again. Strong is not mean. Strong is not selfish. Strong doesn't have time for the haters or the energy vampires. Strong stands up for itself, says its

piece, and moves on. Imagine your unwanted thoughts and encase them in a transparent bubble that floats away from you. Blow them away.

### 8. Keep a Journal.

A journal enables you to consciously note to discern and then change detrimental thought patterns (and also lets you appreciate positive ones). Even something as simple as drawing arrows up or down on your calendar or drawing little smiley faces can help you pay attention to your positive and negative reactions in any given situation or day. Pay attention to your writing and your use of pronouns. Do you use "I" far more frequently than "we"? Free yourself from the prison of your own ideas. Notice if you feel too isolated from others and the world around you; this may be a sign of depression. Mindfulness can help open a window so that you can reach out for help.

### 9. Meditate.

Spend 30 seconds or more allowing your attention and senses to be fully present in the moment. Focus on simple, tactile pleasures: the aroma of flowers, a fabric's texture against your fingers, the taste of homemade bread, and so forth. Get out of your mind and delve into the magic of your senses. Meditate to clean your mind of everything else.

### 10. Set Mindfulness Alerts.

Mindfulness won't come as an instinctive process at first. It takes time and practice. It also may take some scheduling to ensure that you get it done. Set up reminders throughout the day that guide you back to the mentality of mindfulness. Maybe you'll schedule it first thing in the morning with the ring of your alarm clock. Perhaps you'll set up reminders on your cell phone that trill once or twice throughout the day. Find what works for you; stick to a routine that enables you to stop and focus on the moment.

**"Understand right from the start that meditation is about befriending your thinking, about holding it gently in awareness, no matter what is on your mind in a particular moment"**

-Jon Kabat-Zinn



Chuck and Wendy Faught - Grove City, OH  
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