

The Kindness of an Open Mind

by Abigail Miller

Stubbornness is like a hungry cat demanding to be fed, yet determined to only eat what tastes familiar. Often, we are like cats, choosing to “chew” only familiar “foods” and spit out the unfamiliar and hard to swallow. Having an open mind can be difficult, yet one of the greatest things a person can do, because it shows kindness by acknowledging when you are wrong and listening to others even if you are right. The importance cannot be expressed enough. Can anyone grow strong and healthy if they do not eat and drink? Sometimes it does not “taste” good, but as we “chew” on it, we may find that we enjoy the “taste” after all. In a similar way, we sometimes discover that an opinion we do not agree with at first just requires some deeper thinking, and eventually we may find that our ideas change or evolve.

As an American who grew up in the Philippines, I’ve seen many differences between American and Filipino culture. For example, the concept of the perfect life varies for each place. In the USA it is called the “American Dream”, filled with visions of cars, big houses, and vacations. In the Philippines, the level of poverty shapes the needs and wants of the people. Once, when helping a woman with her housing situation, we asked her what she would like as a housewarming gift. We expected her to ask for clothes or something luxurious that she normally couldn’t afford. She began crying and asked only for a bed. This simple request made me so much more thankful for my own bed and everything that I have taken for granted. Giving her a chance to offer her thoughts instead of assuming what I thought she would say gave me insight that taught me to be thankful for what I have.

Everyone has a piece to offer the puzzle of life, and it would be incomplete with only my piece or the pieces my family has. I treasure the ideas and viewpoints of other people because it helps me to become a more sensitive and understanding person. You cannot understand someone’s viewpoint if you don’t allow them to express themselves, yet oftentimes we are so focused on our puzzle piece that we do not allow others to share their pieces with us so we can see the full picture. If we show others that we value their perspectives, we form relationships and friendships which give us tightly knit communities and families.

The purest form of kindness is one that understands it may not receive kindness in return, yet offers itself intentionally and in spite of the wrong things other people may do. My desire is that I may be kind to others by offering them my puzzle piece and accepting theirs even when I do not want to. I must resolve to have the courage to be challenged and the kindness to keep an open mind every day.

Listening Makes a Difference

by Canaan McKinney

Someone I can always count on to be a good listener is my grandmother. She knows that listening can be helpful to others. My grandmother knows it is important to listen because it can help others ease their stress, and calm their fears. She has had difficult times in her life and needed someone to listen to her to help get through those difficult times. Her best friend was there for her. Since her best friend listened to her, now she knows the importance of listening to others. My grandmother now takes the time to listen to me when I need someone to talk to. Now I can grow like she did.

When I was in the fourth grade, I was really nervous about my spelling bee. I did not want to lose and was nervous about misspelling a word in front of the whole school. I really wanted to win, but I was anxious about standing up in front of the entire school. My grandmother told me it was okay to spell a word incorrectly. She also told me that what really matters is trying your best no matter what happens. Then, I can feel good about myself knowing that I tried my best. She also took the time to help me study so I could do well. I even won my class and took second in the school bee.

My grandmother helping me meant a lot. Because she took the time to listen when I was nervous, she helped me overcome my worries. With her help, I did better than I thought I would. Through this experience I have learned listening to others can make a big difference in their lives. Since my grandmother took the time to listen to me, she taught me I should listen to others when they need it. When my friend moved to a new town she was nervous. Since my grandma taught me how to listen to others I was able to listen to her and help her through her fears.

Everyone will have times when something is not perfect. A situation could be confusing, hard, or sometimes really difficult. Even though we might not have the answers, we can help just by being there and listening to others. If everyone would take the time to listen, together we could make the world a better place.

Have You Ever Judged Someone By The Way They Look?

by Elijah Brown

When I was ten years old, I saw this big scary guy at the store with tattoos and piercing everywhere and I immediately thought he was a bad person and he would do something. My mom knew what I was looking at so she told me to stop and not to stare at him. I disagreed and told her so. What I later learned that day changed my life.

One sunny summer day when I was in the fourth grade, we went to the big mega store in my neighborhood for groceries. It was a hot day in Oklahoma, and the endless black asphalt parking lot made the heat unbearable. I didn't want to go, because I don't like shopping and I would rather have been at home playing video games and talking to my friends.

We walked into the door of the megastore and it was crowded. We walked past the fresh fruits and vegetables and over to the meat section. We were hoping to buy some steak and chicken, maybe some roast beef for meals for the week. There he was, standing right in front of us. He was 6'2 and muscled up, with tattoos and piercings everywhere.

I looked at his face, his straight mouth, and couldn't tell if he was happy or angry. I took a step back. My mom noticed my reaction, and she told me to stop and not to stare at him. I put my hand on her arm and tried to pull her away to protect her, but she said that even though he looked like a scary guy, he was nice on the inside.

Suddenly he started talking to us. He told my mom to get whatever she needed out of the store and he paid for it and told us that he wanted to bless someone and help us out. I immediately felt guilty for prejudging someone that was so kind. I know that I wouldn't want to be prejudged so I can't do that to other people. I also learned that tattoos or piercings don't change how people are on the inside. I also learned to listen respectfully to people, even if you don't agree at first, because you might just meet a friend.

The Mind and Change

by Faith Adedokun

As humans, we often change our minds. From our daily outfits to our belief systems, our minds are constantly moving between one point and another. Some move at a quicker pace than others and often whole groups that hold a particular belief grow larger and more accepted by general society. This often breeds distaste and contempt towards those of a less popular opinion. This can lead discrimination, dehumanization, and even violence. However, all these feelings and emotions never lead to actual change. It just leads to a vicious cycle of hatred.

George Bernard Shaw, playwright and political activist, once said, “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” We, as people, desire change in various venues: schools, workplaces, government, and more. In short, we all want change in society, but there has never been a significant change in all of history that was started and completed by one person. Power belongs to the people, not the person. How can we all work together if we constantly tear each other apart? We are like people building a bridge to cross a river, only to go back and rip out the slates because we don’t like the person who put it there. If we are to avoid self-sabotage or self-destruction, we must listen to others who are different. If the world we want to fix is diverse in its problems, then we must be diverse in the solution.

When I was younger, my elementary school was very cruel to neurodiverse children. Words like “stupid” and “retard” were the norm. Even worse, there were those who would act kind to autistic children only to gossip about them behind their back. While I never personally bullied those children, these actions impacted me. I began to think that mentally challenged individuals were genetically wired to be less smart or less important. It wasn’t until I realized that a close family member had borderline autism that I began to think differently. I tried to see the world from his perspective and as I watched him, I realized that he was not less smart or less important. He was brilliant, in fact, and added joy to people’s lives. To be aware of his condition, and to love him anyway, opened me up to his view of the world, and I became more understanding of the neurodiverse children in my school.

If we, as a community, want to help others, we must understand them. What people believe affects their actions and reactions. You don’t extend a helping hand to a shell; you extend it to a person with their own opinions and ideals. To strive for the betterment of society, we must become a society where differing worldviews are welcome.

The world is a collection of communities and real change would be achievable if each community decided to be more open to each other. Once we accomplish this, we can make a kinder, safer, fairer world for generations to come.

Listening and Learning

by Jake Pham

“Listening is being able to be changed by the other person.” – Alan Alda. By listening to others even if you disagree you can still learn a lot. And that's exactly what I did when arguing about the Black Lives Matter Movement. My friends and I debated with each other about the movement and truly listened to each other which taught me more than I could find on the news. Listening to each other respectfully helped us stop arguing about different opinions and create an agreement.

It started when I woke up on a Sunday morning. I ate breakfast while I looked at my phone. I was not expecting the 300 plus new messages on my phone. This was surprising to me because my friends aren't ones to wake up early. It was a back and forth argument between my two best friends about the Black Lives Matter Movement and it was getting heated. One was arguing the protests were becoming violent which causes riots and the rampages were only in Democratic cities. The other argued that they have the right to protest and that they weren't causing the riots, others were. One by one my other friends and I joined in and started taking sides. Things started to escalate and a friend of mine and I wanted to take away the hostility and the chaos.

The plan was not loved at first but soon started taking off. We proposed to have a debating system that would have more organization and talking without interruption. If a debate began and contained more than two people we would simply text a keyword and one side would talk about their talking points. Then the other would go. If needed, there could be a vote on time for research by the people in the debate. Most importantly you couldn't make personal comments even if you were joking during these debates. We made some changes because of the extra time it takes to take turns. Other than that, most of it was agreed on we just had to wait and see if the system worked.

Only two days after the system was formed it was put into use. On Tuesday after school an argument erupted between me and three other friends eager to start a new debate system. I said the word and we kicked off. The topic was also about the Black Lives Matter protests and went very smoothly and with few personal attacks. We were sharing new information right and left and it seemed like we were still friends during our debates. So much was said and even more was learned and I think all of my friends would agree that our new system is so much better now.

Overall, I think that my experience has really influenced me as a devotee. Not only that we worked together to be better friends but we created a system where we could listen to each other and learn. No matter what side we are on even if we disagree we are still learning and being changed by it too.

Friends Don't Have to Agree

by Jordan LoVette

Have you ever wondered why someone would stop eating meat and become a vegetarian? So have I, and that is how this story begins. We were at the lake together last summer, and it was one of the first times Alexa and I were able to be together without masks during the pandemic of 2020. I learned a lesson there that helped me get to know my friend better and understand her feelings. I learned how much Alexa cares about animals, and came to understand why she is vegetarian by listening to her opinions.

It was a beautiful evening, and after a day on the water, my dad was grilling beef hamburgers, and a soy burger for Alexa because she is vegetarian. Alexa and I disagreed about which kind of burgers were the best. I said "normal hamburgers," while she said "soy burgers are better." This was a long-standing friendly debate between us.

Naturally, this turned into a heated discussion. We began to have an argument about why we each thought one idea was better. We talked about it, and Alexa told me why she wanted to become vegetarian. She became vegetarian in 6th grade and had done it ever since. She had watched a graphic video of chickens being slaughtered, and it had really triggered her emotions. That is when she decided to become a vegetarian.

Eventually, I began to understand her reasoning and learned why she wanted to become vegetarian. This ended our argument because I listened to her opinions. I had never really understood why Alexa was vegetarian until then. This made me feel what she was feeling more clearly, and I am thankful for that.

Above all, this argument brought us closer together, and helped me better understand her feelings. I learned how much Alexa cares about animals, and began to understand why she is vegetarian by listening to her opinions. This really made me step back for a second and think about vegetarianism. Listening respectfully to Alexa helped me understand how to respect animals and, more importantly, my best friend's opinions.

COACHING ISN'T CRITICISM

by Kobe Close

Good listeners are important in this world. They are always in the here and now, and are never distracted. They're curious and usually ask the right questions, so that they won't offend the person that they are helping. They are sincere and open-minded, and they don't judge people for what they say. They help solve the problems that the person that they are talking to brought to them. Examples of good listeners include psychologists, doctors, and even parents or family members.

When I think of a good listener, I think of my dad. He has helped me with lots of things by listening to me. He looks me in the eyes when I speak, and he really cares about the issues that I have brought to him. When I am done speaking about my problem, he gives me options of things I can do to help get through it. He gives me his full attention and all of his focus, and he helps me no matter what problem I have.

A few years ago, I discovered that I did not like criticism at all, and hated when people corrected my mistakes. I did not like when my mom corrected my golf swing or when I did not understand a math problem. I would get upset, talk back, or even cry. My dad was there to help me, and he listened to how I felt. Then he taught me that when someone corrected me, they were only trying to help. We came up with a small quote that helped me out a lot: "Coaching Isn't Criticism!" From then on, every time I was corrected, I said thanks instead of getting frustrated.

Since I had that conversation with my dad, I have changed my mindset. When I swing my golf club and someone says that I turned with my arms and wrists instead of my hips, I say 'thanks' and move on to the next swing. When I make a mistake on a worksheet at school, I pay attention to where I messed up and use it as a tip for my next worksheet. When I am corrected in any category, I pay attention to the fact that people are only helping me, and I use the tips that they give me to help me do a better job next time. Every day, I wake up knowing that coaching isn't criticism.

The Importance of Open-Mindedness

by Layne Havlik

When I was asked if I had ever experienced a situation where I was open to another's viewpoints and changed my attitudes, I spent several days turning the question around in my head trying to think of an example, but I couldn't. Then I realized that the prompt itself had altered my understanding of myself. I have always considered myself an open-minded person, but it showed me that open-mindedness is a skill that I need to work on. I also realized how important the skill really is. Being open to others' ideas and viewpoints is the only way that we can be good leaders, solve our issues, and ultimately grow as a society.

Listening to the ideas and viewpoints of others with an open mind is one of the most important factors in good leadership. The job of a leader is to unite people, which can only happen if he or she is willing to listen to both sides of a story and find a way to help people reconcile their differences. Exemplary leaders can recognize that solving a problem is more important than winning an argument or furthering their own agendas. The best leaders are the ones who act as mediators between disagreeing parties.

In today's political climate, we tend to have an "us vs. them" mentality about solving problems. Most of us are guilty of taking a particular stance on an issue before exploring the whole story simply because it is the same as whichever political party we identify with. This causes our goals to become more about proving we are right than finding a solution. We focus so much on which side we are on that we forget that everyone is trying to find solutions to the same problems in the best way that they know how to. It is only by open-mindedly and respectfully listening to ideas different from our own that we can hope to solve the actual issues. Everyone has different perspectives, so when we listen to all of them, we can see the problem more clearly and find a solution.

Most new ideas are built on the foundations of previous ones. For example, how could Thomas Edison have invented the light bulb if Benjamin Franklin hadn't first discovered electricity? When we actively listen to others' ideas and opinions, we are better able to develop our own. Also, contrasting ideas reveal our unique personalities, which adds color to our community as a whole; without them, the world would be black and white. They allow us to learn from each other and better ourselves as long as we openly listen to every point of view.

Reflecting on the importance of being open-minded has taught me that listening to others' opinions and ideas is the only way to advance my ability to lead others and participate in my community to help solve our issues. Every unique point of view has merit and without them, we would not be able to move forward in our thinking. I have learned that it is my personal responsibility to work at being more open-minded because it is how I can become a productive and positive influence in my community.

She Hears Me
by Molly Garrison

Being a good listener involves many different qualities. A good listener is patient. They wait and study what the person is saying so that if they need to give advice after, they can. When you are listening to someone you need to be interested in what they are saying. It is not easy to be a good listener, but it pays off when you are.

I am really lucky to be close with a great listener. I consider my mom a fantastic listener. When I talk to her which I do often, she listens and is patient with me even if I do not need advice. Sometimes I just want to talk to someone and for them to listen, they do not even have to give an answer. My mom is great at that. Another thing that makes my mom a good listener is that when I am talking to her she focuses on me, even if I am not looking at her, she does not take her eyes off of me. When I am talking, my mom makes me feel like I am the most important thing around.

My mom had to listen a lot when we were moving because I had a lot to talk about. I was so scared that I would miss my friends so much. My mom listened and gave advice, and then repeated it at least one hundred times. I was scared I would not make friends, but my mom helped talk me through it. That really helped! My mom was listening to me when I told her that I wish I had some friends that I could invite over after school. So, my mom set me up with a girl from my church and it was so fun. After we had one get together, we started having one every week. She was at my house almost every weekend having a sleepover. It showed me that if someone listens to you they can make a big difference.

Talking to my mom has really impacted me, it has helped me be more open to meeting new people in Oklahoma. I have made a ton of new friends and it is all because of my mom listening to me. When I first moved here I was kind of shy in class and at church, but now that my mom has helped me, I feel that I can be myself around people in my both places. My mom has helped me grow into a more open person around new people. Now I will not be so lonely at school and at church.

If someone is talking to you, make sure you are listening. Just having someone to talk to could make their whole day. If someone says you are a good listener, take that as a huge compliment and always work to be a better listener. I hope that everyone has someone to talk to that will listen as well as my mom listens to me

Dancing Through A Pandemic

by Pari Gulati

It was March 13th when most of us got the news that schools and many offices were going remote for two weeks. As a student, I was excited to get a two week “extra” break, but as the Coronavirus became more prevalent, the two week quarantine became months, and then a whole year. The virus took away my last few months of middle school, my eighth grade graduation, my summer, relationships with some of my friends, and most importantly, my dance graduation.

After seven years of doing an Indian classical dance form called Bharatnatyam, a dancer performs a series of long dances in order to graduate, known as an Arangetram. I started dancing in kindergarten and had been planning this graduation for years. Little did I know that my Arangetram would be in front of an empty auditorium.

When my parents told me that I would have to have a virtual Arangetram I was devastated. I didn't want to talk to them for days. I didn't work so hard just to have people watch me from their homes. I was adamant about having an in person Arangetram and refused to hear anything about a virtual Arangetram. All of my friends were partying, and I was sick of staying home all summer. I wanted an event where I could see all my friends again, I wanted to dance on a stage, I wanted to decorate the hall, I wanted to have a photo shoot, but I did not take into account all the risks associated with that.

After a while, I decided to talk about my graduation with my parents. I was not ready to listen at first because I thought it was impossible to do the things I wanted to do if we had a virtual Arangetram. Once I listened to what my parents had to say and after they listened to what I had to say, we worked together to make everything possible. My parents told me that as numbers were on the rise, it was not a safe idea to have guests in person, but we can book a hall so that you can dance on a stage. That made things better, not only did they agree to a stage, but to a photoshoot, a nice decoration of the hall, and to all my friends watching me virtually. After listening to one another, our conversation led to a virtual Arangetram that was full of excitement, hard work, joy, and dedication. I am proud to say that I had the first ever virtual Arangetram from my dance school, and more people followed in my footsteps.

Having this conversation with my parents allowed me to understand the importance of listening and understanding. At first I just wanted to have everything the way we had planned before the pandemic, but after talking and compromising instead of arguing over it, the graduation turned out to be better than I expected.

I learned an important lesson, rather than arguing on our thoughts, if we hear each other out, we can understand the issues both parties are dealing with and come to a better solution. The utility of conversation is universal and applies to the world as a whole. The solutions we can come to through active and civil conversation can change the world we live in for the better.

The Pursuit of Truth

by Rachel Hintze

This world is teeming with billions of different people, which means there are billions of different ideas and opinions that exist. I meet with a group of people in my grade every Wednesday to discuss what we have all been studying and reading. There are eight different people in my class, and therefore at least eight different opinions that our class has about whatever we are discussing. Our conversations are always fruitful, though, because we have learned the key to successful communication: the pursuit of truth.

A few weeks ago, we were discussing the chapters from our history book about the geocentric and heliocentric theories of the universe. I said something about the heliocentric theory that one of my classmates disagreed with. At that moment, we had three options. I could have instantly given up and let my classmate's idea win, silently disagreeing but outwardly yielding. But that would have left the entire conversation stranded at a dead end, because I would still be thinking that I am right and he is wrong, and I would inwardly hold that against him. As a second alternative, I could have ignored all of my classmate's points and vehemently argued my own side, not letting him get a single word in and not listening to anything else he might say. But that extremely self-centered approach would not have led anyone to the truth - just a blind, forced acceptance of my opinion. Instead of either of those, I chose to listen. I tried to persuade him and the class of my point, because originally, I believed it was correct, but I did not shut my brain off after I spoke. I kept my mind open and I listened to my classmate as he tried to persuade me of his point. As he made his case, I began to see the valid arguments he was making and the faults in my own reasoning. Because we were both working to seek the truth, I was won over to his side.

All too often, we abandon the pursuit of truth in an effort to preserve our own ambitions or social images. But this leaves the world broken. Chaos and disunity rule when each person thinks most highly of himself and his ideas, neglecting all other opinions in an attempt to prove that he is right. On the contrary, when people pursue the truth in spite of their differences, a beautiful picture is formed: every individual's ideas can reveal a new facet of the truth. Even if another person has ideas that are ultimately wrong, you can learn from their point of view to either strengthen your own argument or sympathize with others through their struggles. It is important to be willing to be proven wrong. The world would be a better place if everyone pursued the truth rather than the desire to be right - and that can start with you, today. Like a parachute in action, keep your mind open. And always pursue the truth.

Narrow Paths Lead to Wide Roads

by Trinity Neves

Thoughts can be tricky. Every day, words are put onto our lips, decisions are pushed on us by peers, and at many points, we start creating thoughts that aren't even our own. With everything going on in the world, it's getting harder and harder to think for yourself. Is it your beliefs, or are we so accustomed to agreeing with what everyone around us is saying, that we subconsciously make them our own? Well, we sure have had plenty of time to think about all of this. From Covid-19, to ongoing government battles, to simple human decency, I can say that I sure have had some eye-opening thoughts and new perceptions all because of one simple word; listening.

Covid has honestly changed every person on this Earth's life, whether people believe in it or not. Masks are said to be controversial, and Covid-19 is said to be a relentless virus to some and just an ordinary flu to others. Going into grocery stores has even become a strain; with people yelling to wear a mask, and others yelling back saying, "It's taking away my rights!". But should anyone expect any less? If authorities with power over this entire country bicker in the same way civilians do, how can it be expected for us to do any different?

Although it may not be expected of us, listening could affect the world in many beneficial ways. So many people, including me at points, completely shut off when we hear something that isn't what we think we believe. The narrow paths and narrow minds we have created for ourselves make it nearly impossible to actually sit and listen to what is being said. What many people do not realize is that hearing something is not the same as listening. Hearing is an ongoing process that requires no effort. Listening is the process of understanding and putting meaning into what you are hearing. And though it may involve putting in an effort, it is worth the effort to get closer to the community around you.

I've learned to be respectful and to try to always have a listening ear when it comes to other's points of view and perspectives. For me, I moved across the country from the East-Coast to now the Midwest, and I'm of a mixed-race. So I've never fit in with any "stereotypical" groups. Because of that, it has made me a non-biased person towards people because I don't see them as their race, gender, or any category that a person can be put into. I only see them for who they are, which is formed by their beliefs and cultures, which in most instances, will differ from mine.

But sometimes, it baffles me how hostile people become when others have different perspectives than them. In 1995, Timothy McVeigh was convinced to the point to take the lives of numerous human-beings, all because he believed that his perspective was the only right one. He took it upon himself to "save the American people" when all he did was put fear, hurt, and despair into the now narrow eyes of this country. Years later, we have normalized a fear or a divide between people over things big and small. Take masks, as a more current example. There are two sides to this argument; you wear a mask, or you don't. In my view, the problem is not that people don't realize we are in the middle of a pandemic, the problem is that we have become so hostile and ignorant to what is not in our thought bubble, that we disregard it and simply stop caring. If people could listen, ask questions, and put thought into other viewpoints, I believe the world would be a much more understanding place. Each side wants to be right, that may never

change, but if we could see each side for what it's worth, I think this pandemic could very well be behind us.

No one has to agree with every side of an opinion, or else it wouldn't be an opinion. But being open-minded can open countless windows for new views, new perceptions, and can even bring people together. Every single person can be part of the change no matter who you are or what you believe in. Challenges like these are hard, that is for sure, but anything can be overcome, even if it takes a lifetime. So leave your legacy, and listen.