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HOW DOES GENEROSITY FEED THE SPIRIT?

Worship Message Source

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com>

This church community often talks about generosity as we describe many ways we demonstrate our commitment and values. The words “genius” and “generous” come from the Latin root “Genere”, meaning *to beget*. According to Wendy Lustbader, “a genius for life is to possess the ability to generate warmth and well-being in others. Largesse literally enlarges our lives.”

Warren Buffet announced in 2006 that he would give 85% of his fortune to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Foundation pursues the longstanding goal of curing the globe’s most fatal diseases and improving American education. In setting up the foundation, Bill Gates recounted a litany of reasons why people think that addressing global health problems is admirable:

Some use *economic* arguments: if we cure malaria in an African country, that country’s GNP will rise, and they can then buy more products from us.

Some use *security* arguments: if we don’t cure diseases, their governments will be unstable

Others argue a *global health* perspective: if sick visitors fly to our country, they can bring disease to our shores).

Mostly self-serving justifications.

None of these arguments, Gates said matter-of-factly, is the right one. A mother’s child is sick, *and that child’s life is just as valuable as anyone else*. The world has plenty of resources with which to solve these problems. For the world’s richest couple, generosity is tied to two simple core values:

-- “All lives—no matter where they are being led— have equal value.”

-- And, “To whom much has been given, much is expected”.

When we think of Warren Buffet’s gift, and the footprint of his sister, Doris, in this community, through the Sunshine Ladies Foundation, we are reminded that

generosity is for everyone. If this is how we honor and express human value, then ANY act of kindness counts in the bigger picture. We can all be kind, we can all be generous.

Generosity feeds the spirit when we feel connected and responsible for every human being. Spiritual growth is contagious and can encourage others' spiritual growth.

One of the key teachings of the world's religions is that generosity is an expression of human value, that any act of kindness counts. We are all capable of sharing even if we have a little. The Buddha said that "no true spiritual life is possible without a generous heart" Generosity allies itself with an inner feeling of abundance—that we have enough to share.

The Prophet Muhammad said, "the best of my people will enter paradise not because of their achievements, but because of the mercy of God and that they can be satisfied with little for themselves and still offer generosity to others."

Generosity is one of the five pillars of Islam. One part of it -Zaka- is obligatory charity which purifies the heart and for the needy. The second is Sadaqah – that which is given *freely*, *in truth* to God, to *please* God. This can be financial, a helping hand or just a smile. What we give away generously will be replaced and multiplied by God. In short, the giver will feel spiritually enriched and satisfied for having done the right thing. Spiritual enrichment increases aliveness of our inner space – that place from which we reach out to others.

A Native American community believed an authentic native had a "red" heart, because the heart had blood from being massaged by good works, especially sharing.

In *Beyond Belief*, Elaine Pagels describes the early Christians and their tradition of generosity. Unlike other 2nd Century clubs and societies, the Christian 'family' collected money to support abandoned orphans, food and medicine and

companionship for prisoners, and even provided proper burials for the indigent. Such generosity attracted many newcomers to Christian groups, despite the risks.

Many Americans believe that we are the most generous country in caring for the world's poor, but in fact, based on % of Gross National Income, our governmental contribution is dead last among the 23 industrialized nations and better, 18th, in per capita expenditure on humanitarian aid. Not a statistic to feel proud of..

(From *The New Humanitarian* | Biggest aid donors in 2019

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/04/17/international-aid-record-level-2019>)

"In his '*Song of Myself*,' Whitman addressed both the natural world and the human world in terms of care and generosity. He wrote: "The garden we are creating of the world can be denuded and perilous, a location where the poor and disenfranchised scrap in the night, and where the privileged dither in their selfish waltz toward death.

"Or it can be plentiful and democratic, a peaceful stage where citizens enact a drama centered on serving what we have and one another. The agenda I propose is simple enough. We must relearn the arts of generosity. We cannot, in any long run, survive by bucking against natural forces, and it is our moral duty to defend all life.....

"It's time to give something back to the systems of order (*meaning nature*) that have supported us: care and tenderness. As we work on behalf of one another and the world, we begin to experience the solace of reinhabiting our emotional skins. *Generosity is the endless project.*" How prescient are these words written over 100 years ago for today.

The spiritual gains for generosity are certainly individual, based on each person's value system. Many of us are at a stage in life that affords a broader perspective, and acts of generosity affirm our self worth. As we evaluate how and when and to whom we offer our time, money and knowledge, that very act enhances our sense of self, and our legacy.

At times, an act of generosity seems prudent and pragmatic, but the spiritual gains for the giver and the group are astounding and life-affirming. Many years ago, my

close-knit management team had to, because of a merger, include a new member who seemed “different”—cold and aloof. This conflict was affecting our cohesion and work output, so we began to include this person in social settings, and slowly she began to “fit in” with the group. Over time, she actually became a close friend, and even now is a blessing in my life.

When we are generous in secret, not knowing the rewards, we are chipping away at our own greed and selfishness which cause us sorrow. Kindnesses we share will ripple outwards into the world. “Our laughter can help others endure”, noted Chinese Buddhist Monk, Master Hsing Hun, “our kindness will keep others from fear, while our sensitivity will help them realize the oneness of all sentient beings”.

When we are generous, we feel rich no matter how wealthy or poor we are, because we can recognize that we belong to the whole world.

From *BUDDHA IS AS BUDDHA DOES* by Lama Surya Das.....The more we cultivate generosity in our outer and inner lives, as clumsy as our efforts may be, the more we resonate with the secret and subtle level of our being, releasing its amazing inexhaustible energy into our lives and into the world. When we realize the truth of the Buddhist adage that deep spiritual contentment is the ultimate form of wealth, we liberate ourselves to practice generosity to its fullest extent.

There are still too many times when we may have the impulse to express admiration and gratitude to someone, but for whatever reason do not. For our own spiritual growth, we may wish to change that and experience more lightness of heart from small acts of kindness, more generosity. Giving money is easy because it is impersonal. Giving of time and love is harder because it makes us vulnerable. Which do you choose?

Possible questions for afterwords:

When have I especially appreciated another persons act of generosity to me?
Why was it so special and meaningful? How did I respond?

Thinking of individuals in my life now, what gift would I like from them?
Have I realized that true generosity includes both giving and receiving?