



Generosity

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Giving from the Heart

When left alone, life establishes equilibrium: form flows from abundance to scarcity in the natural course of things. Thus, the natural movement of material goods from formless awareness is from those who have to those who need. But when filtered through the mind, the attribute of generosity becomes owned by the sense-of-self and begins to operate under the constructs of time, distance, and separation. We start giving with pride or regret. “I should be giving more... or less.” While formless awareness moves effortlessly to fill a vacuum, the sense-of-self personally ponders the implications of the gift. The image of self interrupts what is otherwise an organic and spontaneous movement of energy by bringing in comparative giving: “How much am I giving related to others? Do they deserve this gift?”

The constraints on our ability to give are an important aspect of generosity and allow the state of generosity to be held within the practical realities of our lives. We cannot give away everything simply because our heart feels the pain of the world. Generosity considers the giver as well as the receiver. We can see how both the personal and impersonal sides of all issues of the heart need to be considered to work harmoniously in the world. Both form and formlessness work together to inform our lives, all within an actively engaged heart.

The mistake we usually make is to use the egoic state to determine the proportionality of giving. How much to give and how much to retain are questions better left to discernment than self-centeredness. We often give from feeling disadvantaged, a kind of inward poverty that uses generosity to compensate for the sense of self-deficiency. Because this kind of giving concerns the symptoms of the pain, not the pain itself, it will not sufficiently address the problem. Though giving will give us a temporary uplift, it is a little like going on a shopping spree to offset feelings of despair. The despair will return as soon as the excitement of the shopping wears off.

This is an important point regarding all qualities of the heart. All attributes of the heart, like generosity and kindness, usually bring forth highly regarded emotions such as intense feelings of goodness and joy. These are uplifting emotions, especially when we have labored under our assumptions of unworthiness, and become an attractive alternative to seeing our unresolved pain. We can lean on these emotional states to offset the negative emotions associated with our self-beliefs and assumptions. We can even become addicted to the highs of generosity and find ourselves needing the homeless, destitute, and deprived for a spell of relief from our pain.

A subtle, mutual exploitation occurs within all expressions of dependency. Dependency does not foster equality. When we are dependent upon someone being needy, we are working out of pity rather than

generosity. Pity is a facsimile of compassion, and “generosity” based on pity is but an egoic state of mind. Subliminally, we can pass on a message of inequality to those we help, diminishing them as human beings. We can hold them within a fixed perspective and refuse to allow the needy to grow beyond their need for us, because if they did we would have no escape from our inadequacy. True generosity is among equals—we give because someone is in need of what we have, not because they are deficient in some way.

The Gift of Attention

One of the greatest gifts we offer is the gift of our time and attention. Time feels like the ultimate gift because of our limited time on earth. We only have so much of it before we die, so we try to conserve it like other limited commodities. We try to “save” time, avoid “wasting” time, and attempt to dispense our time with the utmost care. We think the proper way to relate to time is to be productive and busy, which then convinces us we did something useful within the time allowed. In this way, form validates its existence by creating more form.

The formation of the sense-of-self is no different. We know we exist by producing something that we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell, or think about. Like a dog marking a tree to establish his place within the neighborhood, we produce something to confirm our existence and give that existence a sense of meaning. We do this not only for the egoic purpose of expressing our worth through the value of our productions but also out of an unconscious doubt about the reality of our existence. Production is our “paper trail”; it proves we are alive and belong where we are.

Being generous with our attention is not productive, because it does not accomplish anything tangible. It does not dig a ditch or pay the bills. All it does is connect. Our culture is so focused on the utility of what we do, on the forms we produce, that we give only lip service to the value of formless activities such as listening, paying attention, expressing gratitude, and being kind. In truth, many of us think these activities take us away from the immediate challenges that need to be surmounted. We like people who are kind but may hold a quiet opinion that such behavior is rather useless.

All of us have had the experience of being absorbed in someone’s attention. We sense the healing within the attention, but we cannot quantify it or prove its worth. The afterglow is that we feel more complete and whole, as if we were held through the entire conversation. When we offer our entire attention we enter formless presence and sanction the connection in ways that form is incapable of doing. We authenticate the person who is speaking and say, in effect, you are worth my time and therefore worth being the person you are. Attention validates us as an essential part of the world, a world that frequently attempts to negate our place within it.

The paradigm of the formless heart works completely contrary to consensus reality. It is not based on time, productivity, utility, or accomplishment. Attention does not express its generosity in orthodox terms. Attention just hears, responds appropriately, holds without judgment, and moves on. Nothing special happens unless you are the receiver of the attentive. If you are, you feel special, like you are speaking to your best friend who has all the time in the world to listen. Attention serves to draw us in to the dimension of generosity, out beyond the world of separation.

* Excerpted from Rodney’s forthcoming book, *Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart*, published by Shambhala in early 2014.