



EXPLORATION

Generosity

Readings



Photo by Danielle MacInnes on Unsplash

A True Saint

by Wendy Lustbader

Antonio Luis Alves de Souza, a Brazilian drummer, was offered an expensive new car after his band recorded *The Rhythm of the Saints*. Paul Simon wanted to thank him for the excellence of his artistry, beyond what he had already been paid. Instead, Souza requested money enough to buy an old building where he could teach theater arts, singing, and dancing to poor children and women from the streets. Fifteen years later, when he died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-four, his funeral procession was followed by 4,000 people dancing and singing his songs.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/21404>

The Benefits of Generosity

by Lisa Firestone

The Dalai Lama famously said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” The same is certainly true for generosity! Generosity — the quality of being kind and understanding, the willingness to give others things that have value — is often defined as an act of selflessness; however, studies are now showing that generosity is actually (selfishly) in *your* best interest. Practicing generosity is a mental health principle, and it could be the very key to a happy and healthy life.

Year after year, more and more studies are highlighting the benefits of generosity on both our physical and mental health. Not only does generosity reduce stress, support one’s physical health, enhance one’s sense of purpose, and naturally fight depression, it is also shown to increase one’s lifespan.

If a longer, less stressful and more meaningful life is not enough to inspire you to rev up your practice of generosity, consider that generosity also promotes a social connection and improves relationships. According to Jason Marsh and Jill Suttie of the Greater Good Science Center, “When we give to others, we don’t only make them feel closer to us; we also feel closer to them.” This is because being generous and kind encourages us to perceive others in a more positive light and fosters a sense of community, a feeling of interconnectedness.

Being generous also makes us feel better about ourselves. Generosity is both a natural confidence builder and a natural repellant of self-hatred.

Source: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-benefits-of-generosit_b_5448218

Where Are You on the Generosity Spectrum?

by Adam Grant and Reb Rebele

TAKERS see every interaction as an opportunity to advance their own interests. They will run you ragged if you don’t protect yourself. But you can get better at spotting takers if you know what clues to look for: They act as if they deserve your help, and they don’t hesitate to impose on your time.

MATCHERS trade favors evenly. They can give as good as they get, but they expect reciprocity. Matching is a transactional, defensive stance — it adds less value for both you and others, but it can be helpful when you’re dealing with a taker.

SELF-PROTECTIVE GIVERS are generous, but they know their limits. Instead of saying yes to every help request, they look for high-impact, low-cost ways of giving so that they can sustain their generosity — and enjoy it along the way.

SELFLESS GIVERS have high concern for others but low concern for themselves. They set few or no boundaries, which makes them especially vulnerable to takers. By ignoring their own needs, they exhaust themselves and, paradoxically, end up helping others less.

Source: <https://hbr.org/cover-story/2017/01/beat-generosity-burnout>

Giving

by B.J. Gallagher

“It’s better to give than receive,” my mother used to say. But it took some years of experience before I fully understood what she meant.

When I gave my subway seat to an old lady, I felt kind.

When I dropped a dollar into the street musician’s hat, I felt generous.

When I let the harried driver cut in front of me on the road, I felt patient.

When I lent a hand to someone at work, I felt a part of the team.

When I brought a meal to my grieving neighbor, I felt empathetic.

When I gave some water to a thirsty dog, I felt happy.

When I wrote a check to a worthy cause, I felt virtuous.

When I gave my friend the benefit of the doubt, I felt compassionate.

I discovered that when I give my time, my attention, my money, my thoughtfulness to another — I feel wonderful.

Mom was right... it IS better to give than receive.

In giving, we generate warmth; in giving, we feel connected; in giving, we discover love.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/21043>



Photo by David Monje on Unsplash

The Gift of Needing Help

by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

The Amish teach that the sick, the elderly, and the dying are gifts to the community because of the love and care they bring forth. That’s a beautiful and generous way to think about what my ‘contribution’ may be now to a community in which I used to be much more ‘useful.’ Allowing others to be generous and tender, giving them occasion for the sacrifices of time and energy that deepen their investment in my life, may



seem like a necessary evil, but perhaps it's a necessary good. I am still a participant. And I cling to the poet Wendell Berry's helpful observation: "Love changes, and in change is true." The way they love me, and I them, has to change.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28055>

Seven Gifts That Require No Possessions

by Monshu Koshin Ohtani

In Buddhism there is the phrase, "the seven gifts that require no possessions." The seven gifts are:

- The gift of gentle eyes, looking at others kindly.
- The gift of a smile and kind expressions.
- The gift of words, speaking kindly to others.
- The gift of the physical body. Acting properly yourself, and treating others with respect.
- The gift of heart, touching others with a heart full of love.
- The gift of a resting place, offering others a place to sit and rest.
- The gift of shelter and lodging, providing others with a room or warm place to stay.

These seven gifts do not require any money or goods in the least. Of course, we cannot live the way the Buddha did. However, we can emulate the Buddha. When we do so, we can better appreciate what a truly wonderful heart the Buddha must have had in order to accomplish what he did.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/19259>

Room for Generosity

by Wendy Lustbader

We are fortunate when aging extricates us from an excessive focus on ourselves. More than anything else, losses in later life can awaken our sympathy and make us stay attuned to the importance of living in concert with others. An interest in serving broader aims may keep mounting — contributing to our local community, helping to ensure the health of natural areas in our vicinity — whatever we can do that connects us to the human prospect as a whole,

even in a small way.

Most of us become convinced that the spirit for a life well lived derives from what we give to others, not from what we amass for ourselves.

...We naturally get caught up in making our way in the world during youth and middle age. There is little time or energy for endeavors beyond our personal sphere — maintaining a home, going to work, raising children. Two or three decades may elapse before we find these involvements less consuming. In the meantime, a longing for connection to something beyond these spheres slowly gains force.

Later life is the time when we tend to have room in our lives for generosity. It gives us reasons to prevail over our personal difficulties and grants us access to vital sources of renewal. We find there is strength in doing what good we can for others, not as an intellectual construct but as a robust way of meeting each day.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/21404>

When Nothing is Everything

by Lama Yeshe

A rich benefactor came to a monastery with an offering equivalent to thousands of dollars. In the temple sat a beggar who had nothing. When he saw the rich man make the offerings, he rejoiced with all his heart: "What this rich man is doing is wonderful. I'm so poor. I wish I were rich so that I could make such offerings." At the end of the ceremony, when the abbot, who was obviously clairvoyant, did the dedication of merit, he emphasized the beggar's merits, the virtue created in his mind by rejoicing, rather than the merit created by the benefactor. Why? Because the benefactor was proud and wanted people to think that he had done a fantastic thing. He came with expectations and ended up with nothing. The beggar, on the other hand, came with nothing and ended up with incredible merit and with the dedication.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14027>

Wisdom Story

Rumi: Ten Thousand Miles Away

by Andrew Harvey

One day Rumi asked one of his young, snotty disciples to give him an enormous amount of rich and delicious food. This young disciple was rather alarmed because he thought Rumi was living an ascetic lifestyle. Rumi used to pray all night and eat hardly anything. The disciple thought, "Aha,

now I've really got the master—what he really wants to do is to go off somewhere secretly and eat all this food!" So, he decided to follow Rumi.

He followed him through the streets of Konya, out into the fields, out into yet further fields. Then he saw Rumi go into a ruined tomb. "I'm finally going to unmask his pretensions," the young disciple thought. But what he found was a totally exhausted dog with six puppies, and Rumi was feeding the dog with his own hands so that she could survive to feed her children.

Rumi knew that the disciple was following him, of course, and turned to him smiling and said, "See?" The disciple, extremely moved, asked, "But how on earth did you know that she was here? How did you know that she was hungry? This is miles away from where you are!" Rumi laughed and laughed, "When you have become awake your ears are so acute that they can hear the cries of a sparrow ten thousand miles away."

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17219>

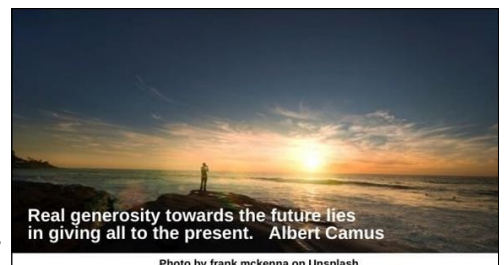
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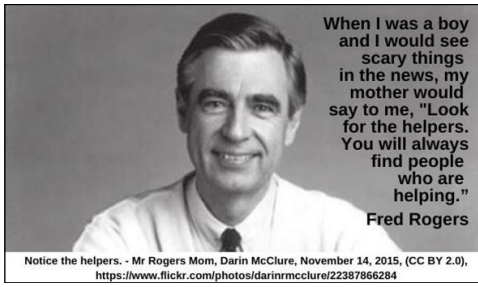
"Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish. Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to do." Richard Dawkins

"Every minute of every hour of every day you are making the world just as you are making yourself, and you might as well do it with generosity and kindness and style." Rebecca Solnit

"Whatever the gift one precondition is essential: To offer, in the moment of giving, all of ourselves. Generosity that is unwilling or cold or distracted is a contradiction. When you are generous, you do not spare yourself." Peiro Ferucci

"Forget pay-it-forward or anything about karma. This is just about being nice and good with no expectations of reciprocity or personal gain. Let someone cut ahead of you





in line, listen to someone who needs an ear, give a compliment you really mean. Make your default mode one of generosity. It's a nice way to live and it's contagious." Dr. Frank Lipman and Danielle Claro

"We must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. Maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices." Elizabeth Gilbert

"I believe all suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of inner peace and contentment, which in turn must be achieved through the cultivation of altruism, of love and compassion and elimination of ignorance, selfishness and greed." Dalai Lama XIV

"Being generous often consists of simply extending a hand. That's hard to do if you are grasping tightly to your righteousness, your belief system, your superiority, your assumptions about others, your definition of normal." — Patti Digh

Being generous is ...not just a core part of the human condition, but a universal moral urge, our defining nature. Since generosity so defines our human nature, it is one of the few things on which people around the entire globe, though on different pathways, can agree. Theodore Roosevelt Malloch



"Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of your arm. As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands: one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." Sam Levenson

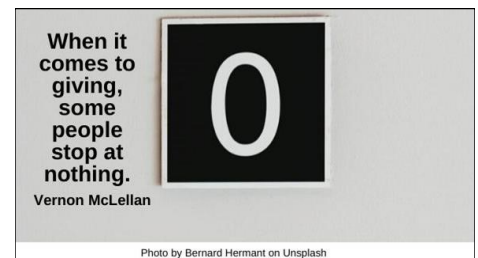
"The belief that unhappiness is selfless and happiness is selfish is misguided. It's more selfless to act happy. It takes energy, generosity, and discipline to be unfailingly light-hearted, yet everyone takes the happy person for granted. No one is careful of his feelings or tries to keep his spirits high. He seems self-sufficient; he becomes a cushion for others. And because happiness seems unforced, that person usually gets no credit." Gretchen Rubin

Questions

1. Wendy Lustbader writes about a Brazilian drummer who turned down an expensive, new car for money to start an arts center for poor children and adults. This made him beloved in his community. How does the quality of generosity affect a person's legacy?
2. Lisa Firestone suggests, based on research, that "being generous ... makes us feel better about ourselves." How does being generous make you feel? How have you felt when others have been generous to you?
3. Adam Grant and Reb Rebele describe the four points on the generosity spectrum. Where do you think most people fall on that spectrum? Why is that so? What are the benefits and liabilities of each point on the spectrum?
4. B.J. Gallagher writes about how different acts of giving made her feel. Recall a specific act of generosity that you did and share how it made you feel. Do you agree that "it is better to give than receive?" Why or why not? How does the ability to receive affect the ability and desire to give?
5. Marilyn Chandler McEntyre describes the Amish view of the benefits that the sick, elderly, and the dying confer on the community. Bringing forth love and care is a lovely sentiment, but one that is not typically shared in society. How can the Amish attitude lead to beloved community? In what ways is your congregation a caring community? How could the culture of caring in your congregation be strengthened?
6. Monshu Koshin Ohtani shares the Buddhist list of the "seven gifts that require no possessions." Which of these gifts have you given to others? Which of these have you received from others? How could the practice of giving these gifts affect our relationship to generosity?
7. Wendy Lustbader writes, "Most of us become convinced that the spirit for a

life well lived derives from what we give to others, not from what we amass for ourselves." Do you agree? Why or why not? How does the practice of this sentiment impact the materialistic striving for possessions? How might this sentiment lead to embracing simplicity? Lustbader suggest that advancing age creates space for more generosity. Do you agree? Why or why not?

8. Rev. Mary Wellemeyer's opening words, *Food for the Spirit*, focuses on the approach to caring in different congregations. What are some of the caring practices and/or rituals in your congregation? How do these foster beloved community? Are there things not currently practiced that could increase your congregation's caring and generosity?
9. Katie Gelfand's chalice lighting lifts up the sense of abundance as being crucial in a congregation. Where is your congregation located on the scarcity-abundance continuum? What attitudes foster a sense of scarcity? Of abundance? In terms of your life, where are you located on this continuum? Why? How is a sense of abundance linked to acts of generosity?



10. Andrew Harvey's story about Rumi describes how sensitive Rumi was to need and the lengths that he went to respond with generosity. In your life, what has awakened you to respond with generosity?
11. Richard Dawkins states, "we are born selfish." Do you agree? Why or why not? The problem is not that we begin in selfishness. The problem occurs if we remain stuck in selfishness. How can we teach generosity and altruism to others? To youth? To children?
12. Rebecca Solnit suggests that as we make ourselves, we are making the world. Why would this be true? What is the personal cost to us of doing what we do with "generosity and kindness and style?" What is the impact on the world when we do this? Is this worth the personal cost?
13. Piero Ferucci writes, "When you are generous, you so not spare yourself." On the generosity spectrum, this is the

definition of a “selfless giver.” What are the benefits of this kind of giving? The liabilities?



14. Dr. Frank Lipman and Danielle Claro suggest that we should make generosity our default mode. How would this change you? How would it change the world?
15. Elizabeth Gilbert concludes that there is no way that we can repay all those whose generosity has sustained our life. In place of repayment, she counsels gratitude, for saying “thank you” for as long as we have voices. Do you agree? Why or why not? Is this enough? Does gratitude lead to generosity? Why or why not? Which would have a greater impact: repayment or paying it forward?
16. Per the words of the Dalai Lama XIV, how can generosity alleviate suffering in another person? In the world?
17. Patti Digh lists some of the things that limit one’s ability to be generous. Is there something that you would add to her list (e.g., arrogance)? How do her attributes lead to a “hard heart?” What role does fear play in these responses? What can soften the heart and lower or remove these barriers to generosity?
18. Theodore Roosevelt Malloch asserts that generosity is a “universal moral urge.” Do you agree? Why or why not? What other things might prompt us to respond with generosity?
19. Gretchen Rubin suggests that being selfless is a source of happiness? Is this true for you? What other things are sources of happiness? Rubin then suggests that happiness is a discipline that requires energy, generosity, and light-heartedness? Do you agree that happiness requires significant effort? Why or why not? On the selfless-selfish continuum, where do you fall? Why?
20. Lama Yeshe shares a story about the rich benefactor and a beggar. The conclusion of the story suggests that generosity does not depend upon external wealth, but upon an internal attitude of generosity? Do you agree? Why or why not?

