



# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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## Generosity



### Introduction to the Theme

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul listed generosity as one of the fruits of the spirit. Generosity is also a fruit of gratitude. In Judaism, *tzedakah*, a Hebrew word, is equated with charity. This act of kindness, however, combines generosity with justice. Ironically, such giving is understood to spiritually benefit the giver more than the recipient. *Tzedakah* is similar to one of the five pillars of Islam, which is *zakat*. It refers to charity, but also means both “purification” and “growth.” In Buddhism, the practice of giving and the virtue of generosity are called *dana*. It is one of the “ten perfections.” At its essence, *dana* is considered to be revolutionary, as are *tzedakah* and

*zakat*, because it is giving freely without any expectation of receiving something in return.

As these examples imply, generosity is a spiritual practice. Generosity is framed in different ways to try to capture its profound nature: revolutionary generosity, extravagant generosity, generosity of spirit, compassionate generosity, generosity seeding possibility, sacred generosity, storms of generosity, etc. Unitarian Universalist minister Tom Owen-Towle writes, “A synonym for generosity is magnanimity, which adroitly combines two Latin words for ‘large soul’ (*magna* and *anima*).”

The Indo-European root of the word generous, *gene*, means “to give birth” and gives rise to words like germinate, generate, genius, and kin. Generosity is the act that creates beloved community, connecting people through a mutuality of giving and receiving. In Buddhism, the simple rice bowl becomes the monk’s begging bowl, a symbol of a vow of poverty. Daily the monks go out

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### Generosity & Building Beloved Community

In Beloved Community, generosity is one of the coins of the realm. We are implored to be a Good Samaritan, for at one time or another we will surely be the man who is attacked and lying along the side of the road. Generosity helps to transform an ordinary community into one that is beloved. Generosity, in the words of M. Scott Peck, transforms our hard eyes of judgment into the soft eyes of respect. Generosity is a redemptive act, a saving grace because we do not have to be generous. What compels generosity? Compassion? Duty? Lovingkindness? Gratitude? Faith? Empathy? Culture? Humility? Love? Generosity is the mustard seed of which Jesus spoke. This least of all seeds becomes one of the greatest herbs.

*Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>*

## Wisdom Story

### The Better Offer

*adapted from a historical Islamic tale*

Uthman ibn Affan was one of the first followers of the prophet Muhammad. He was a very wealthy man who was known ...for his generosity. ...

Uthman lived in Medina, which is in modern-day Saudi Arabia. This is a very dry part of the world where there isn’t a lot of rainfall. One year, in the year 640, to be precise, the rains did not come and there was a drought.

Without any rain, food crops withered. There were no figs on the fig trees, no olives on the olive branches. ...Things got so bad that the people had to eat the leaves from the trees in order to survive. Without food, the people knew they would starve.

You can imagine how happy the people were the day they learned that a caravan of 1,000 camels was approaching



Medina. Each camel was laden down with food. The people began to imagine the smells that would fill their kitchens when they were cooking their favorite meals. ...Best of all, they imagined going to bed with full bellies for the first time in weeks.

Knowing that the caravan belonged to

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## Building Beloved Community

## Giving Away Wealth

(Continued from page 1) **The Better Offer**  
Uthman ibn Affan made the people rejoice even more, for they knew of his reputation for generosity. Surely, he would give them a good price for the food he had for sale.

The merchants also rejoiced to hear that the caravan was approaching. For months business had been slow because they had no food to sell. ...The merchants began to imagine their shops filled with hungry people....

Knowing that the caravan belonged to Uthman ibn Affan was not welcome news for the merchants, however, for he had a reputation for being a very sharp businessman. Although he was fair, Uthman ibn Affan drove a very hard bargain.

Nonetheless, the merchants immediately went to Uthman ibn Affan.

Uthman ibn Affan received all of the merchants graciously. No one was surprised, however, when he rejected their first offers.

"I am afraid I cannot do business with you," he said, "for I have already received a better offer."

The merchants ...raised their offers, again and again, but each time Uthman declined, repeating, "I am afraid I cannot do business with you, for I have already received a better offer."

The merchants began to grumble among themselves. ...By refusing the prices they offered, he was driving the price for the food higher and higher. Some folks in Medina might not even be able to afford it at all.

Finally the merchants made their best offer: five times the value of the cargo. Surely Uthman would accept. Who could possibly have offered more?

"I am sorry," Uthman responded. "I cannot do business with you. You see I have received a better offer from Allah, from God, for Allah has said that anyone who gives away wealth in Allah's name will get back far more than he gave away." ...Uthman ibn Affan ...gave away all of the food carried by the 1,000 camels in his caravan. He gave it away in Allah's name ...to the starving people of

Medina. Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session9/story1>

## Practice Generosity

### Buddhist Generosity

*Thích Nhất Hạnh*

Every person, no matter what their wealth, is equally capable of practicing generosity. Some people think that they can practice generosity only if they are wealthy. This isn't true. Some people who are very wealthy do practice generosity, but many only do charity with the aim of gaining merit, profiting, or pleasing others. People whose lives are grounded in compassion are seldom rich because they share whatever they have with others. They are not willing to enrich their lives financially at the cost of others' poverty. Many people misunderstand the Buddhist expression "practicing generosity" to mean casually giving five or ten cents to a beggar on the street if we ...have it in our pockets.



The practice of generosity is more beautiful than that. It is both modest and grand. Practicing generosity means continually acting in a way that will help equalize the difference between the wealthy and the impoverished. Whatever we do to ease human suffering and create social justice can be considered practicing generosity.

...Practicing generosity in a Buddhist context means to consider everyone equal, not to discriminate against anyone. There are cruel persons and kind persons among the poor and destitute, just as there are among the wealthy, and we must not exclude the cruel ones from our practice.

...If we teach Buddhist philosophy through lectures, but do not practice generosity, ...we have not yet attained the essence of Buddhism. We should practice generosity with compassion and not disdain, without discriminating against [anyone].... Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/16998>

## Cycle of Hospitality

### Generosity to the Self

*Nanette Sawyer*

Generosity is the completion of the cycle of hospitality. It is made up of our actions toward those whom we are welcoming—an outflow of physical, spiritual, and emotional care and nurture. Generosity involves giving a little bit more than we think we can, but in hospitality to the self this doesn't mean giving it away.

...Being generous toward ourselves in a physical way—by honoring our bodies and taking care of them—is a wonderful way to bring the practice of hospitality to ourselves full circle and revere the holy in us. Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17828>

## Circle of Community

### Teaching Generosity

*M.J. Ryan*

I ...heard a story about how the Onondaga people used to teach their children about generosity. When it was time for someone to learn, the tribe would gather in a circle. The child would be brought into the center of the circle and given wonderful things to drink. After he had his fill, a voice would come from outside the circle, saying, "I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty," and the child would be encouraged to take the drink to the thirsty person. The child would be brought back into the circle and fed fabulous food. After, he would hear a voice outside the circle, saying, "I'm hungry, I'm hungry." Again, the child would leave the circle to feed the hungry person. The child would return to the circle and be given beautiful, warm clothes to wear. Again, he would hear a voice, crying, "I'm cold, I'm cold," and he would gather up clothes and help dress the freezing person.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28416>



# Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "Every time I take a step in the direction of generosity, I know that I am moving from fear to love." Henri J.M. Nouwen



**Day 2:** "Giving is a miracle that can transform the heaviest of hearts. ...But true giving is not an economic exchange; it is a generative act. It does not subtract from what we have; it multiplies the effect we can have in the world." Kent Nerburn

**Day 3:** "The Buddha said that no true spiritual life is possible without a generous heart. ...Generosity allies itself with a ... feeling of abundance, ...the feeling ...we have enough to share." Sharon Salzberg

**Day 4:** "A generous heart is never lonesome. ...The lonesomeness of contemporary life is partly due to the failure of generosity. ...We compete with each other for ...goods, ...image, and status." John O'Donohue

**Day 5:** "To cultivate generosity directly is another fundamental part of living a spiritual life. ...Generosity can actually be practiced. With practice, its spirit forms our actions, and our hearts will grow stronger and lighter." Jack Kornfield

**Day 6:** "...It helps to think of generosity as an internal approach that develops and manifests itself in the world through action. In this it is much like meditation, prayer, worship, or other religious practice." Mark Ewert

**Day 7:** "Receiving is an art.... So many people have been deeply hurt because their gifts were not well received. Let us be good receivers." Henri J.M. Nouwen

**Day 8:** "Generosity is not always tax deductible." Ken Solts

**Day 9:** "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

**Day 10:** "Of the various kinds of intelligence, generosity is the first." John Surowiecki

**Day 11:** "The ground's generosity takes in our compost and grows beauty! Try to be more like the ground." Rumi

**Day 12:** "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." Simone Weil

**Day 13:** "To quote the exceptional teacher Marva Collins, '*I will* is more important than *IQ*.' It is wonderful to have a terrific mind, but it's been my experience that having outstanding intelligence is a very small part of the total package that leads to success and happiness. Discipline, hard work, perseverance, and generosity of spirit are, in the final analysis, far more important." Rafe Esquith

**Day 14:** "Too many have dispensed with generosity in order to practice charity." Albert Camus

**Day 15:** "True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the 'rejects of life,' to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individuals or entire peoples—need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world." Paulo Freire

**Day 16:** "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

**Day 17:** "To be good is an unnatural condition. There is no man that is born knowing what humility is, what kindness and compassion and hope and love and generosity are. These are things that must be learned. Learned through trials and through pain and through suffering...." Carlos Ramirez

**Day 18:** "When it comes to giving, some people stop at nothing." Vernon McLellan

**Day 19:** "It's not the depth of your intellect that will comfort you or transform your

world. Only the richness of your heart and your generosity of spirit can do that." Rasheed Ogunlaru

**Day 20:** "Money is but one venue for generosity. Kindness is an even more valuable currency." Alan Cohen

**Day 21:** "When ordinary human beings perform extraordinary acts of generosity, endurance or compassion, we are all made richer by their example. Like the rivers that flow out of the *Karakoram* and the *Hindu Kush*, the inspiration they generate washes down to the rest of us. It waters everyone's fields." Greg Mortenson

**Day 22:** "Generosity has little to do with giving gifts, and everything to do with giving space to others to be who they are." Patti Digh

**Day 23:** "What good is a world—what is the point of living—if generosity and kindness are myths?" Michael J. Sullivan

**Day 24:** "Generosity is a lifestyle that seeks to understand the needs of others and strives to bring an end to that suffering." Jeff Shinabarger

**Day 25:** "Generosity is the only legitimate selfishness." Mario Benedetti

**Day 26:** "Today, give yourself permission to be outrageously kind, irrationally warm, improbably generous. I promise it will be a blast." Sasha Dicter



**Day 27:** "Acts of generosity are essential to the spiritual life, reflecting

as they do an awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings." Rami Shapiro

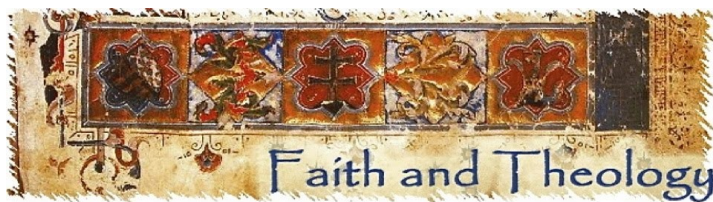
**Day 28:** "I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there was mercy and generosity." Nelson Mandela

**Day 29:** "With generosity of spirit I experience a largeness of self; it doesn't matter whether or not I get something back from it. It is its own reward." Parker Palmer

**Day 30:** "Generosity is the most natural outward expression of an inner attitude of compassion and loving-kindness." The Dalai Lama

**Day 31:** "It is the heart that does the giving; the fingers only let go." Nigerian proverb





## Generosity: Time & Tithing

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker

...In his essay, *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin narrates the depth of loss and grief experienced by people of African descent in North America. He shows how self-loathing, ...ugliness ..., and ... despair descend over people's lives.

Yet, at the end of the essay, Baldwin invokes the rhythms of jazz, the resilience of people hard oppressed, and the freshness of new life he sees in children. The question remains, he says, "What to do with all this beauty?"

This question challenges me more than any other in life. How do I live in a way that keeps faith with beauty—with the beauty I have known, the beauty of all people everywhere, the beauty of the earth? How do I resist the violence that tears us from one another and the earth? When the violence goes deep into the core of the human soul, as it has mine, how is the heart restored?

As I have struggled with these questions, I have come to understand that if I am to recover from violence, live in love, and contribute to healing and transformation, I need to engage in spiritual practices that preserve knowledge beyond what the dominant culture tells me about who I am.

...I find two spiritual practices especially helpful as pathways to doing this. These practices are simple and ancient, but they ask a great deal of those who follow them. I recommend them to you.



The first religious practice is keeping the Sabbath. To keep the Sabbath means, once every seven days, to step out-

side the dominating culture and enter another space. On a regular basis, stop participating in life as it is defined for us.

Choose one day out of seven to not go shopping. To not do any work. To not bring any work home. Instead, give yourself and your family the space to feel what it is hard to feel when you spend all your time, as the poet says, "getting and spending and laying waste your powers." Give yourself time to notice. Walk in the woods and see how the leaves of the willows are coming out, the azaleas are budding.... Give yourself time to sit at the table with friends, to welcome the friendless into your home, to talk with one another. Give yourself time to read, think, and reflect. ...Stop the madness and rest. Open yourself to the beauty and the meaning of life.... Find a way to know the things that the marketplace can neither give nor take away.

...To keep the Sabbath is a radical act of resistance to a culture that has lost track of the meaning of life. ...

The second spiritual practice that I find helpful is just as simple, just as ancient, and perhaps even more unfamiliar. This spiritual practice is tithing. To tithe is to give ten percent of your income for the common good.

When I commend tithing to you, I am not suggesting tithing in spirit, tithing in principle, or tithing as metaphor. I am suggesting giving away ten percent of your income. It can be difficult, but it can be learned. In fact, I don't think that anyone who tithes has come to it by anything other than learning it. If you've never done it, start with one percent, then move to two, then to three. Work your way to ten percent, step by step. You don't have to give it all to one place. You can give part of it to your church and part of it to people and places that work for the healing and transformation of life.

...Steve De Groot talked about why he tithed. "I first began to tithe," he said, "because I was taught to obey the teachings of my church, and tithing was one of them...." Steve went on. "But then, I matured in my faith: I came to my own reason for tithing. ...I tithe because

it tells the truth about who I am. ...I am a person who has something to give. I am a person who has received abundantly from life. I am a person whose presence matters in the world. I am a person whose life has meaning because I am connected to and care about many things larger than myself alone. If I did not tithe, I would lose track of these truths about who I am. By tithing, I remember who I am."



This is the endangered knowledge in our culture that can be preserved by religious practices that teach us a different sense of who we are.

Like all of us, I know I am at risk of forgetting or never coming to deeply know that to be a human being is to live in a world that provides richly for human life, including mine, a world that is to be stewarded, not abused. I do not want to lose track of this knowledge. We are in a world that has enough land to feed all of earth's people and that has enough resources to shelter all of earth's children. If I forget this, and if I forget that my presence matters, then I fail to act as a person who blesses life and who contributes to *tikkun o'lam*—mending the world. I become, instead, complicit with violence, a numbed and alienated soul, who has surrendered to untruth. By tithing, I open myself up to what the old theologians called the means of grace. I keep myself open to remembering who I am and what life is, what is precious and what it is to feel, what it is to be connected intimately to earth, to history, to other human beings and what it is to live justly. When I remember this, I know what to do with all the beauty. I know, with Rumi, "There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

Source: *Everyday Spiritual: Practice*, edited by Scott Alexander, 1999, Skinner House Books, Boston.

### From Gratitude to Generosity

Michelle Richards

We all want our children to develop an attitude of gratitude, but there is a lot working against us in this department. Bombarded with messages celebrating consumerism, children may find it hard to be grateful.

...Countless parents have experienced dismay and embarrassment when their child opens a gift and, instead of saying "Thank You," utters an exasperated, "I already have this."

...Beyond explaining gift etiquette and how one should respond even if a gift is unwanted, parents can model generosity. Our children watch what we do, so be sure to let them witness our own acts of kindness to others, particularly strangers or others in need. Our children also need to witness us giving money to the charities we support and volunteering for non-profit organizations—including our congregations.

As a present for birthdays, holidays, or on some other occasion, instead

of getting one more toy or other item which will soon be discarded, parents can ask extended family members to consider giving a [gift] certificate to your child with the promise that you will give a set amount of money to a charity of their choice.

...Generosity doesn't involve only financial giving. Helping others, either through random acts of kindness or through volunteering your time, is being generous, too.

... Finally, it's important not to overlook the value of writing and sending thank-you notes for the gifts our children receive. ...After all, gratitude is the loving twin of generosity. When we feel grateful, we are often generous—and when we are feeling generous, it helps us be grateful.

Source: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/teaching-gratitude>

### Family Activity:

*Ways to Cultivate a Giving Spirit*

Michele Borba

**Prioritize caring.** ...Prioritize charitable-ness.... ...Display photos of your kids engaged in thoughtful endeavors....

**Be a charitable role model.** ...Studies show that if parents are generous and giving, kids are likely to adopt those qualities.

**Make it a family routine.** A simple way to inspire children's generosity is by reinforcing it. Keep a box by your backdoor to encourage family members to donate their gently used toys, games or books.

**Acknowledge charitableness.** When your child acts in a kind-hearted way, say so: Thank them for being kind or helping out.

**Use real events.** ...Talk about how you

might help in the local community. It could be ...thinking about ways to assist the most vulnerable—like the homeless—during the winter.

**Start a "giving plan."** Encourage your children to give a portion of their Allowance—or tooth fairy money—to a charity of their choice.

**Find your child's passion.** Kids are more likely to want to get involved in service projects that match their interests. Help your kids choose something they ...enjoy doing.

**Make charity a family affair....** Find a service to do together, like serving in a soup kitchen.

**Recap their impact.** ...Encourage your child to reflect on her volunteering experiences.... Remind your kids that their caring efforts are making a difference.

**Keep giving.** ...Look for ways to help your children experience the joy of giving on a regular basis....

Source: <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/for-parents/articles/2017-01-16/10-ways-to-raise-a-charitable-kid>

### Financial Generosity

Mark Ewert

Generosity

can have many expressions, including care, time, skill, intelligence, gifts, and money.

...One cannot omit any of these without curtailing them all. Financial generosity is one of the most challenging expressions, and perhaps holds the most opportunity to make a difference in the world and our own well-being. ...The word philanthropy comes from the Greek *philanthropia*. Broken down into its parts, it translates to *phil*—"loving"—and *anthropos*—"mankind." Therefore: loving or useful to mankind. ...This updating of the term—and restoring more of its original meaning—applies, no matter what form or scale your generosity takes.

...Lama Surya Das, quoting the Buddha, wrote, "Giving brings happiness at every stage of its expression. We experience joy in forming the intention to be generous; we experience joy in the actual act of giving something; and we experience joy in remembering the fact we have given."

... There are legions of generous people in every community. Yet ...most of our cultural messages around money support the opposite trajectory—toward stockpiling, improving our social status, and counteracting our daily stress by spending for our own comfort, even on things that are not good for our health and well-being.

...Generosity includes the idea of open-handedness, along with a connection to our internal experience and spirituality. We can apply the concept very broadly to encompass how we treat each other everywhere: on the street or at distant locations, to create connections with people we do not know, and to weave a community of care with.

Source: *The Generosity Path: Finding the Richness in Giving* by Mark Ewert, Skinner House Books, Boston (2014)





## The Limits of Wealth: Thanks, Dad, for Showing Me How Poor We Are

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme** into the town or countryside to have their bowls filled by the people living there. This ritual is one of profound reciprocity: the lay people in the community provide physical support to the monks and the monks provide spiritual support to the people in the community. Sue Bender writes that “the essential practice of a monk is to accept what is placed in the bowl—and be grateful.” Because the relationship between the monk and the community is one of profound mutual benefit, the term begging bowl is inadequate. It is, in fact, a bowl of generosity and possibility, a bowl of compassion. This kind of bowl is also a symbol for a beloved community. Each week, a congregation forms the bowl of community into which people place gifts, and from which people take the love, support, and encouragement placed in the bowl of community.

This concept of generosity is compellingly conveyed in the movie, *Pay It Forward*, which was directed by Mimi Leder. Twelve-year-old Trevor McKinney accepts the challenge offered by his new

ripple of one good deed, paid forward to 3 people, then 9, then 81, illustrates the exponential power of generosity as each person pays it forward to three others. By contrast, failure to pay things forward has a chilling effect. As Unitarian Universalist Barbara Rohde writes, “Gifts that are not received die. Gifts that we try to hoard die. Gifts that we cannot or do not hand to another die.”

Tom Owen-Towle reminds us that, “Generosity undergirds and underwrites all other values [that are required to grow a beloved community]. Without generosity, one loves sparingly, if not stingily; without generosity our acts of justice happen rarely; without generosity we hoard our precious gifts of time and soul and other resources.”

Poet Galway Kinnell, a New Englander who won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, captured the power and process of generosity in his poem *St. Francis and the Sow*.

Kinnell wrote, “The bud / stands for all things, / even for those things that don’t flower, / for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing; / though sometimes it is necessary / to reteach a thing its loveliness, / to put a hand on ... [the] brow / of the flower / and retell it in words and in touch / it is lovely / until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing; / as Saint Francis / put his hand

on the creased forehead / of the sow, and told her in words and in touch / blessings of earth on the sow....”

To reteach a thing its loveliness we have to be present, we have to pay attention, we have to gaze with the eyes of love to see the inner reality of loveliness of a

child, of a sow, of a stranger. Re-teaching a thing its loveliness is an act of generosity so that it flowers again and again and again from within of self-blessing.

The story is told of a very wealthy father who took his son on a trip to the country with the purpose of showing his



son how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what was considered to be a very poor family. Driving back to the city, the father asked his son, “How was the trip for you?”

“It was great, Dad,” replied the son.

“Did you see how poor people live?” the father asked.

“Oh, yes,” the son said.

“Well, tell me, what did you learn from the trip?”

The son answered: “I saw that we have *one* dog and they had *four*. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us; they have *friends* to protect them.”

The father was speechless. Then his son added, “Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are.”

Generosity is not about how much we have compared to others, but about how much we can joyously share with others.



social studies teacher, Mr. Simonet. The assignment is to think of something that will change the world and then put it into action. Trevor comes up with the idea of paying a favor—not back to the person who helped you, but forward with new good deeds done to three people. The

## The Bread & Butter

### The Power of Generosity

Sharon Salzberg

When we think about generosity, most of us probably don't think immediately of a powerful force, an inner resource, a real tool for changing how we relate to ourselves, to others, and to our world.

Instead, we may think of it similarly to how we think of kindness or compassion—qualities that are gentle, tender, potentially self-effacing—and ...more aligned with weakness than strength. ... This is because ...we think of generosity ...in terms of ...giving something up for someone else. This ...implies at least some degree of self-sacrifice.

...Generosity generates its power from ...letting go. Being able to give to others shows us our ability to let go of attachments.... It might be in our nature to think, "*That object is mine for X, Y, or Z reason.*" But we choose to let it [go] through the cultivation of generosity. It is in that choice ...that we carry ourselves to a state of greater freedom.

Our attachments might want to put a cap on our generosity..., "I will give this much and no more...." But it is through the practice of generosity that we learn to see through the attachment....

...Generosity ...is a movement toward freedom. That is ...why generosity can be a force, a resource, a tool.



...Whenever the Buddha was teaching lay people, he would always begin with a teaching on generosity because it can bring so much joy and self-respect.

...Generosity is the bread and butter of feeling connected in our lives—to ourselves, to others, and to life itself.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/blog/the-real-power-of-generosity/>

## A Powerful Thing

### Generous Conversations

Krista Tippett

Listening is an everyday act, and, Perhaps, art that many of us neglect.



Listening is more than being quiet while the other person speaks until you can say what you have to say.

Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own best words and questions.

...I've learned this: a question is a powerful thing.... Questions elicit answers in their likeness. Answers mirror the questions they rise, or fall, to meet. So, while a simple question can be precisely what's needed to drive to the heart of the matter, it's hard to meet a simplistic question with anything but a simplistic answer. It's hard to transcend a combative question. But it's hard to resist a generous question. We all have it in us to formulate questions that invite honesty, dignity, and revelation. There is something redemptive and life-giving about asking a better question.

Questions themselves can offer no immediate need of answers. Counter to our notion that everything must have an answer, some of the most worthwhile questions are the ones with no immediate answers.

...There is value in learning to speak together honestly and relate to each other with dignity, without rushing to common ground that would leave all the hard questions hanging.

Source: <https://fs.blog/2017/01/krista-tippett-listening-questions/>

## The Endless Project

### Relearning Generosity

William Kittredge

The Cockerall Butterfly Center was close to the bone. Who could dream this up? Maybe someone feeling deprived, tired of closing their eyes. Two thousand quasi-free butterflies, 50 to 60 widely different varieties, were fluttering away their lives within the expansive confines of a cone-shaped three-story glass tower. ...Maybe that's civilization's main reason for contact with other forms of life these days; we like to have them around because their presence reminds us of rhythms that might

keep us sane. ...The creatures, alone with us amid infinities, are our only companions.

As we watch, life forms are disappearing. It's like watching our invulnerabilities vanish. Of all our myriad duties, preservation has to be central.

...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 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 re-inhabiting our emotional skins.

Generosity is the endless project.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28268>





# Small Group Discussion Guide

## Theme for Discussion Generosity

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “The Buddha taught, over and over, that generosity is the first door we walk through if we are serious about our spiritual work. Without generosity enlightenment is flat-out impossible. We’re too self-centered. Unless our relationships are bathed in generosity, they don’t have a chance. At the other extreme, generosity can buttress a faltering relationship, giving other *paramitas* [i.e., virtues] time to work their magic. It fuels the little extras, the surprise moments that keep us fresh and interesting.” Geri Larkin

**Chalice Lighting:** (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** “In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back

the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, 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

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What has been freely, generously given to you?
2. What story comes to mind of a time when someone gave generously, graciously to you? What happened and how did you feel?
3. Do you remember ever receiving an anonymous gift? What happened and how did you feel?
4. What and from whom have you learned about giving?
5. When have you felt good about giving generously?
6. How do you fill yourself up (spirit, soul, energy), and how does that relate to your generosity?
7. If generosity is about the amount of giving of time or money or love, what are the barriers to generosity that affect you in your daily life?
8. Do you have a practice of generosity or can you imagine one? What does/ would the practice look like?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice:** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words:** Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

# Revolutionary

## Inspiring Generosity

Barbara Bonner

Generosity is an activity that can change the world. It works its magic on one person at a time; then, almost effortlessly, its beautiful multiplying force animates families, friends, communities, cultures, and the world at large.

Unlike its close cousin, compassion, generosity requires *action*. To be a generous person, you must act.

...Generosity is a practice. And as with anything we practice, we get better at it over time. ...Generosity can be revolutionary.

...Generosity is often quite bold, ignoring the advice of friends and family and moving forward with courage and conviction. Generosity is willing to take risks. In fact, risks have little constraint on a generous heart.

Generosity invites us to put ourselves in another’s shoes, see and feel the existence of a pressing need, realize that it is within our power to help, and then act in whatever way we can. It’s really as simple as that.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/26297>



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