

Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

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Generosity

The nature of generosity is to open ourselves to giving freely. On the surface, most of us would be considered “generous people.” We make efforts to be kind, to do the “right thing,” and to make donations to people who are struggling and causes that provide services to those in need. We contribute to organizations that reflect our beliefs in goodness while balancing the needs of our family, our future, and our own sustainability. And yet, if we sincerely want our generosity to make a difference for the betterment of others and ultimately ourselves, it might be worth taking a closer look at the variety of opportunities we have to practice generosity and to notice where we might be holding back.

Being generous with money

While giving money is only one aspect of generosity, I notice it is usually given center stage. We live in a world that wants to solve all problems with money. The more I give to organizations, the more I find my mailbox full of requests to give more. I find myself wondering if money is the best way to support someone and if there are other ways I might contribute as well. Giving money is valuable in many circumstances, but it also exposes what money cannot heal. Could we expand our perspective on generosity? Are there more effective ways to express our generosity, ways that can heal ourselves and each other?

Being generous of mind

When we consider being generous of mind we ask ourselves to pay attention to how our thinking mind might be contributing to the healing or suffering of ourselves and each other. Pause right now to check in with your automatic, conditioned thoughts and assess the content currently in your

mind. Is your thinking fear-based, or open hearted? Is it coming from a desire to get rid of a situation or to move with clarity? Are you allowing opportunity for thoughts to clarify, or are you offering a response from conditioned reactivity? Is there room within to be more generous of mind and allow time for conditioned thoughts to settle? In the stillness, there is possibility for fresh perspective and insight to come forward. It is always worthwhile to pause and allow for the unconditioned mind to reveal itself and thus leave room for a more generous perspective toward the circumstance at hand.

Being generous of body

When we consider being generous of body, we turn our attention to the experience of our physical being in the moment. Most of the time we are totally unaware of how much our physical body is doing for us as we move through every day. The nature of being generous of body encourages us to be willing to notice what heals or harms our physical being. We take time to notice how our body serves us with every breath, sight, sound, and movement. Bringing awareness to how we use our hands, our feet, our eyes, our ears; how our whole

body is nourished by each breath and our heart consistently beats rhythmically with the force of life itself while we barely notice. When we are generous with our physical being we remember to take the opportunity to witness how we move in the form of the I-as-a-me, as well as how we are physically connected in I-as-awareness.

Being generous of heart

In order to be generous of heart we need to pause and notice what our heart feels—literally, in

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Generosity

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the moment. When we allow ourselves to authentically acknowledge whether it feels tender and guarded, or open and at peace, we can use this awareness as our clue to recognizing right timing to take action or refrain from causing harm. We don't have to alter this experience, but in being present to the very texture of the heartspace we can allow room in the stillness for any experience of struggle or joy to be acknowledged. With a generous heart, we can allow for our authentic experience to be what it is and let it reveal itself as it goes through its sorrows and joys. In a generous heart state we have the chance to open to our fullest potential to love beyond the boundary of fear of being hurt.

Being generous of spirit

When we tap into the abstract dimension of the spirit we are touching on the very texture of our aspiration as it floats in awareness. When we are generous of spirit we allow space and time to feed our own energetic being. We are also feeding the potential for the unconditioned to flourish within us. When we are generous of spirit, we renew ourselves with our meditation practice and the inspirational teachings that help us clear a path of energetic equanimity. This can result in kindness and understanding for ourselves and the potential for kindness and a more generous spirit toward others.

Being generous with time

Time is one of the areas where we have the most difficulty being generous. We try in vain to hoard our time because we are caught up in the belief that we are "too busy" and "that there are not enough hours in a day." This fear-based view of time results in restless anxiety that we will "never get it all done." And yet if we are honest with ourselves in most instances we waste a lot of time procrastinating and fretting about the amount of work we have to do, rather than focusing on being alert, engaged, and showing up fully to the task at hand. When we approach time with generosity we begin to notice that all we ever can do is work as efficiently as possible in each moment. All that fretting doesn't speed

things up. Rushing never helps. Awareness helps. Efficiency helps. Clarity of action helps. When we humbly show up to each moment, we may even find ourselves generously offering our time to others to assist them in some way, thus creating even more potential for shared benefit.

Living through the lens of generosity

When we think we're used up we can look at our life through the lens of generosity and see that we have more to give. Generosity asks us to go beyond ourselves and touch the place of connectedness with the other...to recognize that I-as-a-me is narrow with limited resources that get used up, and I-as-awareness provides a fresh and expansive pool of possibilities to live from.

So it's important that when we are feeling used up and weary and frustrated and overwhelmed

that we look again. Can we stop and first be more generous with ourselves, allowing recognition of the mental and emotional and physical state of I-as-a-me, and

then with gentle compassion, breathe into I-as-awareness?

Can we make room to pause in a moment of discomfort to simultaneously remember to open to the possibility of being more generous in the moment? We are not conditioned to do this; in fact, we are told that if we go beyond our perceived limits and are "too generous" we will just be taken for granted and undervalued. This is true if our generosity is a fear-based offering that is cloaked in anger and resentment. False generosity will result in, at best, false comfort (aren't I a good person even though I'm suffering greatly) or, at worst, physical and emotional collapse that feeds exhaustion, sickness, sadness, and depression.

Authentic generosity, on the other hand, receives its energy and willingness from its pure nature in awareness. Authentic generosity, like compassion and love, comes from that inner connection to the vastness, that formless field of benefaction that takes practice to open to. It is always satisfying and doesn't require anything of others in order to thrive.

Diane Moore

Can we stop and first be more generous with ourselves?