

## **GIVING and RECEIVING**

1 A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving. **Albert Einstein**

2 We may be rooted in a specific family and culture but we come to this earth to open up to others, to serve them and receive the gifts they bring to us, as well as to all of humanity.  
**Jean Vanier**

3 You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. **Amy Carmichael**

4 When we give cheerfully and give gratefully, everyone is blessed. **Maya Angelou**

5 The best things to do with the best things in life is to give them away. **Dorothy Day**

6 Giving generously in romantic relationships, and in all other bonds, means recognizing when the other person needs our attention. **Bell Hooks**

7 When we give freely, we feel full and complete; when we withhold, we feel small, petty, impotent, and lacking. We are meant to learn this great truth, that giving fulfills us, while withholding and trying to get causes us to feel empty and even more needy. **Gina Lake**

## **Entitlement, Greed, and Generosity**

8 To *abstain from taking what is not offered* [the second of the Buddha's five precepts] is more than not stealing; it asks us to consider what makes something ours; it acknowledges that we sometimes make assumptions about what we're entitled to that don't match the assumptions of others.

While this genetic tendency towards greedy behavior is still with us, so is an impulse towards generosity. These two streams aren't necessarily at war with each other, its more as if we can choose which channel to use in a given situation. The more time we spend exercising our generosity, the stronger it becomes, and the more likely we are to default to that attitude.

As with all of the Buddha's teaching, it starts with view; what lens are we using to perceive the situation at hand? Is the perspective "what's in it for me?", or "how can I help?", or something else?

The Buddha lived in the knowledge that greed leads to suffering and that generosity is a form of freedom, and we can live in that knowledge, too.

**Lynne Kelly**, from her blog post, "Give and Take" from her blog, The Buddha's Advice to Laypeople

### **9 A Prayer for Generosity**

Gracious God, give us generous hearts:

to share whatever gift it is that you have given to us;  
to acknowledge you as the giver of all good gifts;  
to give without counting the cost;  
to share without expecting something in return;  
to be wise in the way of caring for ourselves and others;  
to hold all of our treasures and values with open hands;  
to have gospel priorities and to align our life, love and time in their light;  
to be gracious and unbegrudging in our giving;  
to recognize the abundance of blessings in each passing day;  
to know the freedom that comes with true generosity;  
to accept our talents, whether many or few, and to use them in service of others;  
to grow in giving thanks for everything;  
to be happy with having what we need and wise enough to know what it is that we want and do not need;  
to fall more deeply in love with the God of all generosity so that our hearts are strong enough to give away freely whatever is asked.

### **--Sisters of Charity Health Systems blog**

10 Mankind was my business; charity, mercy, benevolence and forbearance were, all, my business. The deals of my trade were but a drop in the comprehensive ocean of my business. The ghost of Jacob Marley speaking to Scrooge in A Christmas Carol by **Charles Dickens**

11 One must be poor to know the luxury of giving. **George Eliot**

12 If nature has made you for a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart; and though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can

give things out of that—warm things, kind things, sweet things—help and comfort and laughter—and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all. **Frances Hodgson Burnett**

13 Listen to the words you say. The very words you say to them are the very words you need to hear. Humans tend to give each other what they themselves need. **Kate McGahan**

### **What Gets in the Way**

14 You often say; I would give, but only to the deserving, The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.

Surely he who is worthy to receive his days and nights is worthy of all else from you.

And he who has deserved to drink from the ocean of life deserves to fill his cup from your little stream. See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving. For in truth it is life that gives unto life-while you, who deem yourself a giver, is but a witness.  
— **Khalil Gibran**, *The Prophet*

### **Practices**

15 The next time you want to withhold your help, or your love, or your support for another for whatever the reason, ask yourself a simple question: do the reasons you want to withhold it reflect more on them or on you? And which reasons do you want defining you forevermore?  
— **Dan Pearce**, *Single Dad Laughing*

16 Practice giving things away, not just things you don't care about, but things you do like. Remember, it is not the size of a gift, it is its quality and the amount of mental attachment you overcome that count. So don't bankrupt yourself on a momentary positive impulse, only to regret it later. Give thought to giving. Give small things, carefully, and observe the mental processes going along with the act of releasing the little thing you liked.  
— **Robert A.F. Thurman**

### **From the Writings of Jean Vanier**

*Philosopher, writer and humanist Jean Vanier is the founder of two international organizations for people with intellectual disabilities, L'Arche and Faith and Light. He died May 7, 2019.*

17---The cry for love and communion and for recognition that rises from the hearts of people in need reveals the fountain of love in us and our capacity to give life. At the same time, it can reveal our hardness of heart and are fears. Their cry is so demanding, and we are frequently seduced by wealth, power and the values of our societies. We want to climb the ladder of

human promotion; we want to be recognized for our efficiency, power and virtue. The cry of the poor is threatening to the rich person within us.

18---Jesus came into the world to change and transform society from a “pyramid” in which the strong and clever dominate at the top, into a “body”, where each member of society has a place, is respected and is important.”

19---We are sometimes prepared to give money and a little time, but we are frightened to give our hearts, to enter into a personal relationship of love and communion with them. For if we do so, we shall have to die to all our selfishness.

## **20 When Giving Is All We've Got**

***One river gives its journey to the next.***

We give because someone gave to us  
We give because nobody gave to us.

We give because giving has changed us.  
We give because giving could have changed us.

We have been better for it.  
We have been wounded by it--

Giving has many faces: It is loud and quiet.,  
Big, though small, diamond in wood-nails.  
Its story is old, the plot worn and the pages, too,  
But we read this book, anyway, over and again:

Giving is, first and every time, hand in hand,  
Mine to yours, yours to mine.

You gave me blue and I gave you yellow.  
Together we are simple green. You gave me

What you did not have, and I gave you  
What I had to give--together, we made

Something greater than the difference.

***--Alberto Rios, 2014***

## FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

A What will you take away from these readings? Have you read anything that has changed your thinking or that will cause you to change your behavior?

B Why do you think our theme is giving and receiving instead of merely giving or even generosity?

C Is it difficult for you to receive? Think about a specific instance and ask yourself why. Keep asking why.

D What are the best and worst experiences you've had as a giver? As a receiver?

E Think about your relationship to All Souls in the context of giving and receiving. What do you give and what do you receive? For many of us, these will be long lists. The opportunities to give or to give more are many. Are these decisions complicated or straightforward? How might you give or receive differently?

---Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian