

Reciprocity and the Value of Clean Giving and Receiving

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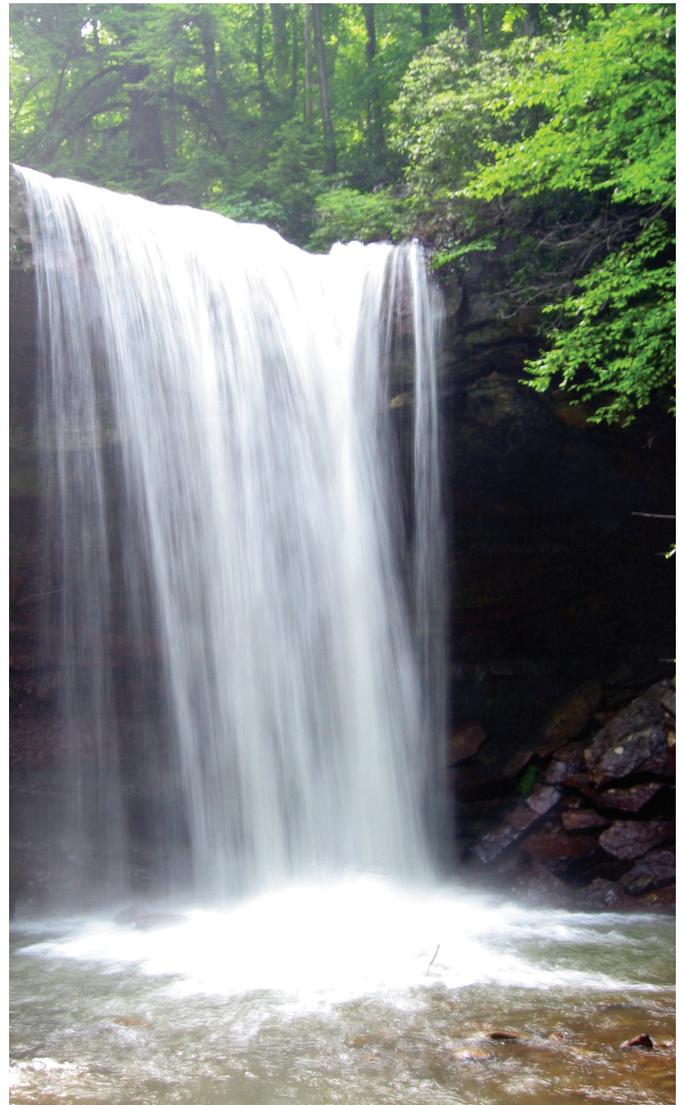
In many cultures, the symbiotic interrelatedness of all life is implicitly understood and acted upon through the acts of giving and receiving. Since time immemorial, people have lived in relationship within community, giving of their services, products, talents and support to each other. This implicit reciprocity is a powerful force which acts as a glue that creates a web of mutual support through which individuals as well as communities prosper. It bears witness to the truth within the saying that “We are individual, but not separate”, and ensures that we can go through life supported and fulfilled.

In our modern world, we have strayed from this understanding and instead aligned with an ‘explicit’ reciprocity based on expectation and a ‘tit-for-tat’ mentality; and while this approach does produce some successes, it ultimately limits us from experiencing the extraordinary riches which come only when we allow reciprocity to work its power and magic, naturally!. Author Wayne Baker, in his bestseller *Achieving Success Through Social Capital*, eloquently states that, “...we cannot pursue the power of reciprocity. When we try to invoke reciprocity directly, we lose sight of the reason for it: helping others. Paradoxically, it is in helping others, without expecting reciprocity in turn that we invoke the power of reciprocity. The path to reciprocity is indirect: reciprocity ensues from the social capital built by making contributions to others.”

In other words, we must learn how to give (and by implication receive) ‘cleanly’.

Clean Giving and Receiving

Clean giving is unconditional, with no strings attached. For those who understand this know that to give unconditionally because it is the right thing to do, automatically invokes a dynamic interchange through which they prosper in every way. In Corinthians (9.6-1), it states that, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.” In the Qur’an, it says “Give not with the thought to gain, and be patient unto thy Lord”.



Such wisdom enjoins us to give of ourselves even when there is no prospect of immediate return, inviting in the spiritual qualities of trust and faith - without which we stay stuck in fear, insecurity, mistrust and lack. We are essentially here to give fully and freely of and from ourselves and in so doing, we find a freedom, a liberation and sense of purpose which makes our lives happy, meaningful and fulfilling. We need only look to the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa as inspirational icons who came, gave fully, and left this world enriched beyond material measure.

Each of us has been gifted with a unique ability and all we need to do is open to it, explore it, develop it and ultimately offer it wholeheartedly to all those who can benefit from it. We must strive to move beyond a survival mentality which separates us from others and creates the illusion of lack, making us miserly in our giving and miserable in our being. An Inuit proverb states that “Friends make gifts and gifts make friends”, showing us that it is through our reciprocal relationships of giving and receiving that we become connected, inspired, enriched, happy and joyful.

By giving 'first', we initiate a dynamic interchange which nourishes us, just as an exhale is automatically and naturally followed by an inhale. As Walt Whitman put it, "The gift is to the giver, and comes back most to him – it cannot fail." For me, just as the gift of life has been given to us, we too must give back to life our gifts. It is through this dance of mutual sharing and enrichment that a rhythm which is harmonious, nurturing and nourishing is created and sustained. Perhaps this is why the bible says that "It is more blessed to give than to receive", for implicit in this statement is the knowing that giving and receiving are not separate acts and that once we start the giving, the receiving automatically happens.

Opening to Giving and Receiving

With giving, I often hear clients say that they feel they don't have anything to give. To me, I don't buy it! Every soul comes bearing many gifts, including the gift of their own unique being which itself is priceless. And there are always opportunities for lending support to others – be it by assisting a needy friend, family member or neighbor, volunteering at a community events, finding a cause and supporting it through giving of your time and energy, or donating material things to those less fortunate than you. It is simply a matter of being willing to give.

At a deeper, more personal level, you can also give by choosing to invoke qualities such as 'forgiveness' when life challenges you most. It is curious that the word itself tells us that we are here 'for-giving'! Yet, we refuse to forgive, both others and ourselves, consequently becoming entrapped by and in the past. This keeps us from receiving valuable gifts of the present which is where we ultimately find peace and happiness! It is through forgiveness that we let go of judgment and open ourselves to qualities such as compassion, empathy and love, all of which automatically emerge like the sun from behind the clouds, shining forth equally on all. And it is at this juncture that we realize that true giving comes through, not from, us.

With receiving, many of us experience even bigger obstacles than with giving. There are countless 'over-givers' in the world who are so busy giving (as it puts them in control), that there is little space left for them to receive, a situation which creates much confusion, anger and resentment. In other situations, many just feel too guilty and unworthy to receive and thus disrupt and sabotage the natural flow of reciprocity through giving and receiving. Others are so concerned about 'strings' being attached to what they are receiving and the obligations that these create, that they also go without as they do not know how to open to receiving.

The good news is that regardless of the giver's intent, you always have the power to receive what you want. Essentially, as long as your intention is clear in receiving, any manipulation or strings on the givers part can remain with them. Many years ago this insight freed me to receive in situations, especially with family and friends, where I was not certain of what strings may be attached. I realized that my job was not to police their intentions but rather, own

mine. Therefore, I learned to graciously receive support and let go of trying to figure out what I would 'owe' others who gave to me. It also made my giving cleaner as I was clear about my intentions in giving and let the receiver determine theirs.

Reciprocity, as a naturally occurring state, is much more than a simple economic exchange. It is a self-sustaining and when aligned with, creates a social bond through which all of us can prosper and grow. Rather than trying to force, manipulate, control or manage it, for maximum success I suggest you acknowledge and align your actions to it. Learn to give openly and wholeheartedly, and stay just as open to receive the multitude of blessings which must return to you. And return they will, for as the Buddha stated some 2500 years ago, "Consider the flame of a single lamp. Though a hundred thousand people come and light their own lamps from it so they can cook their food and ward off the darkness, the first lamp remains the same as before. Blessings are like this, too." ■

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