

Session 10.1: Problematic Motivations

Living in the Gift

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In the following few sections we are going to look into the application of Gift to economic life, to work, and especially as it involves money. This probably doesn't mean operating entirely outside the money system, although for some people there might be movement in that direction toward a demonetization of life to some degree, nor are we talking about barter which is really more of a transaction than a gift, but really how to bring the spirit of gift into our practical economic life.

Generally what I mean by business in the gift or working in the gift is something that diverges from conventional fee-for-services or price-for-products. This course is an example. Rather than set a price, I let the course participant decide what, if anything, is an appropriate return gift. My wife Stella does the same for bodywork. She gives the gift of healing and the receiver decides if he or she would like to give something and what feels good and right and appropriate to give in return. I do the same thing for live events, for retreats. Usually I require that people pay room and board if they can afford that. When I lead retreats, I typically require people to pay for room and board if they can afford that, and then invite them to give whatever feels appropriate, good, fair and right with respect to their financial means, the feeling of value that they have and their desire to support the work.

This isn't the only way to do business in the gift, it's just my personal variant. I have been doing it this way for a number of years and I have learned a lot about what does and does not work. I think I am at a point now where I can generalize and transmit what I've learned. This is important because I've heard from a lot of people saying that "gift economy" has not worked for them. In fact it is rare to hear that it does work. I think I understand something now of how to make it work, and I will tell you, it isn't a matter of the way you present it or the business model you use, primarily. You can copy the language I use on my site, but it won't help if the foundation is not solid. So let's talk about that and at the same time we're going to extend the concept of working in Gift or living in the Gift Economy to a much broader realm.

Whatever it looks like in the end, if you want to move more into the gift in your life the place to start is first to look at your motivations for wanting to do that. Honestly, your motivations are probably mixed. I know mine were and so I'd like to share with you some of the problematic motivations that will generate unpleasant consequences in the long run.

So one motivation for wanting to be in gift could be doubt about the value of what you offer you have to offer. If you don't charge for something and offer it as a gift it could be a way to hedge your bets, to pre-empt dissatisfaction because after all, they didn't have

to pay. Now there is nothing wrong with this, we do it on Craigslist all the time. If it isn't valuable enough to sell, I'll give it away for free. It's fine to do that, I don't expect that you'll make a living like that. People will sense your hesitancy and it will likely infect them as well.

The remedy for this is not to pump yourself up with false confidence that your offering is valuable. It is to look at where the doubt comes from. Maybe your doubt about the value of what you have to offer is well-founded. Maybe your offering really isn't valuable, such as that fabulous raw onion chunk ice cream you invented. Or maybe your offering is not connecting with the people who actually need it. Or maybe the doubt is an expression of doubt about your own worth. So you think, "I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, deserving enough to sell it at professional rates, so I'll do it by gift and I'll hope people will pay me anyway." Any one of these things could be among your motivations.

If this self-doubt is present, it will reflect back as lack of abundance. Especially speaking of the expression doubt is a doubt of your own self worth. It is a kind of stinginess toward oneself and will usually draw the same from others. But please don't commit the Law of Attraction error of thinking that any business failure or financial hardship mirrors your own scarcity consciousness. It might, but it might not. Lack of success can mean lots of things. It could just be a very prosaic signal that you need to adjust your offering or you need to understand better what people need. Let's not paint over these practical things with our metaphysics.

OK, so once you have clarified what part of the doubt is self-doubt and what is authentic doubt about your offering, then you will have the ability to be honest. You will be able to say, "I'm not sure if this onion chunk ice cream is very good," or, "I am not sure if this workshop is for everyone." And it won't be a pity play and it won't be self-doubt in disguise. People will trust you, and you will have access to the information you need to improve your gift.

OK, let's move to a second problematic motivation for wanting to be in Gift. I mentioned it in an earlier unit – it is the desire to appear to self and others as a good person. It is to create an image of purity, of blamelessness, of selflessness. It is to be exculpated from complicity in the money machine, to cleanse yourself of the taint of commerce or to be above it all.

This motive will lead to humiliation... if you are lucky! Any time we inflate our own spiritual ego and go around thinking we are better than other people, we invite experiences that show us otherwise. These are humiliating, and that's good. It's good because the result of humiliation is humility. If we are lucky that happens sooner rather than later. Then we have the opportunity either to accept the medicine of humbleness or to bulldoze past it, cover it up, manage the situation – and invite a bigger dose of medicine later.

If the motive of a pure image or self-image is there, people are going to pick up on that. They are going to resent you for being holier-than-thou. The only way they will be generous is if you manipulate them into it by hooking their desire to be seen as virtuous too. This psychological manipulation might work, but you won't be living in the gift, you will not have that ease and freedom of living in the gift. You will be a con artist or you will be a cult leader. You won't "think" that's what you are, you might go around thinking yourself pure, but you won't feel good. You will feel as if there is a rat gnawing at your soul.

A more likely scenario is that you don't have the skill set to be a con artist or cult leader, so instead people simply won't give you much. In a way, you will have been successful. Your image will be pristine. You will have risen above the taint of money.

To the extent a holier-than-thou attitude is present; people will avoid giving you anything. So please, before you take a step into Gift Economy make sure the reason isn't so that you can count yourself as a good person. Remember the principle from earlier – we are all in this together. That is the spirit to take into gift economy.

Here's another way to look at it. If you hold yourself superior to those who are in the money matrix, you are actually being stingy with them. You are not holding a generous interpretation of their lives. Such judgments are contrary to the spirit of gift. They keep you from living in the reality of Gift. The reality of Gift is generosity, it's not just financial generosity, it's a generosity of how you see other people. If you release the self-judgements and the other-judgements, the logic of gift will work much better for you (the logic of gift being, "as you give, so you shall receive.") The wealth of one is the wealth of all, that's the logic of Gift, but it only works if you are in the world of Gift, in the universe of Gift, in the perception of Gift.

Let me talk about one more problematic motivation. This one is harder to pin down. It is a kind of distaste for the messy world of commerce, or a frustration with it, and a desire to retreat to a less fraught way of doing things. It's the feeling, "I just don't want to have to deal with this whole money thing." Well, I'm sorry but the messiness of human affairs is unavoidable. People carry a lot of trauma around money and it is likely to show up whether you try to practice gift economy or not. Specifically, when people just don't want to deal with money they put out an invitation for others to not deal with money either. We're just not going to talk about it. We'll put the donation box in the corner and we won't mention it.

You can imagine what happens then. You won't find much in the box. Living in the Gift is not about avoiding difficult issues. It does not bypass the social injustice and personal trauma that pervade the realm of money. If anything, it asks us to confront these issues with more honesty and more compassion than ever before.

Probably everyone listening carries at least a trace of all these problematic motivations. That's OK., you don't have to be perfect to take a next step into gift economy. I have not said, "If any trace of this motivation is present then you will fail." It is a matter of degree. To the EXTENT that it is present, you will encounter difficulties. And in a way, these difficulties are a gift that will help you clarify your deeper, divine motives. I have gone over the problematic motives at the outset to bring to them the light of attention. Please don't react defensively if you notice them within you. These are not something you have to conquer. You don't have to root them out. Just give it some notice. Give it some awareness, some attention. The biggest danger of these motivations is that it operates unconsciously. If you give them some gentle attention, knowing it comes from a wound that wasn't your fault then they will begin to heal. And especially also to feel your willingness for that wound to heal.

We've looked at three problematic motivations here: self-doubt, vanity, and escapism. Next time we will look at some of what we might call the sacred motivations for stepping into gift.

For our seed sentence today , we'll use the antidotes to the three poisons we explored. The antidote to self-doubt is "I am valuable." The antidote to vanity is, "I am beautiful." The antidote to escapism is "I am willing." These three mantras are not to be used dogmatically. Let me tell you how to use them. You can use one or all three together. To use them effectively you have to associate them with a felt state. So let's do that.

Close your eyes. "I am valuable." Feel the resonance of truth within yourself. Feel your inherent worth. Feel your knowledge of your inherent worth. Know it to be true. "I am valuable."

Open your eyes for a second or two. Now close them again. "I am beautiful." Feel the resonance of truth within yourself. "I am beautiful." Feel your inherent beauty that is already there and always will be, inseparable. "I am beautiful." Know this to be true.

Open your eyes again for a second or two. Now close them. "I am willing." Feel the resonance of truth within yourself. You came here to do this. Feel your innate willingness to engage life. Feel your essential aliveness. "I am willing." Know this to be true.

And that concludes today's session. Practice your seed sentence, maybe putting all three together. Touch that place where they are true, and see what happens!