

Session 11.2 - Silver Lining

Living in the Gift

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Hello again,

This time I want to talk about one of the most valuable things that can happen in the practice of gift economy which is when you say run and event by gift and it doesn't work.

“Doesn't work,” I mean hardly anyone gives, you don't even cover expenses or something like that. Doesn't work. What do you do with that? Doesn't work. Maybe you decide to do your massage practice by gift, and instead of the \$100 an hour that is the going price, someone gives you a dozen eggs from their chickens, or an apple pie, or a handmade dream catcher you don't want. A lot of people have told me that, inspired by my book, they have tried gift economy and it hasn't worked. So this hasn't worked. When it doesn't work is valuable because it reveals things that were hidden. Well it can mean that.

The failure could mean one of several things. One of them I refer to in the first part of this session, the simple possibility that maybe your gift wasn't well given maybe it didn't inspire gratitude. Maybe your seminar wasn't very interesting. Maybe it didn't reach the people who would benefit from it. It might be like this:

Here's a little story. Once upon a time there was a baker. He was inexperienced and the bread he baked was either rock-hard or uncooked and doughy in the middles. Sales were terrible. So he thought, I'll offer it by gift instead. He went around giving his bread away, asking people to pay what they liked. But still they hardly gave him more than a polite dollar or two.

Next, he went to baking school and got really good at making artisanal slowrise whole wheat bread. Unfortunately, he set up his bakery in gluten-free-ville. No one buys his bread, so he decides he will offer it by gift instead. He goes around giving it away, and no one gives him more than a perfunctory dollar or two. So is that because gift economy doesn't work? No the problem lie in a gift model of business. A gift is only a gift when it meets a need. The lack of return gifts can be a message from the world asking you to refine the gift, or the manner in which it is given.

It could be that or it might not be that at all. It might be an opportunity to look at what surfaces in your being about the failure . It might be a chance to examine old programs of “I'm not good enough” and “Nobody wants me.” If these are residing within you, the generosity of the universe is such that sometimes the opportunity will arise for them to rise to the surface for healing.

That might not be it either. The lack of return gifts or failure and this applies whether you use a conventional business model or a gift model – could also be the divine intelligence helping you clarify which master you are serving. In other words, it helps you clarify, it could be just any old business too but it helps you clarify. Are you doing it for the money, or are you doing it to give something to the world? By pushing through hardships and setbacks, we can learn the depth of our own commitment. And when we are stopped by the challenges and setbacks, we learn that we weren't as committed as we thought, and that there is maybe something else in the offing to which we will truly committed because that is what we want in life. If you find yourself being stopped that is not necessarily a suggestion that “oh you better become unstoppable like so and so because look at what that person sacrificed and how hard they worked to be successful. If you want to be successful you better sacrifice that much, you have to work that hard too “. That's kind of getting it backwards. It could be more about finding the thing that you care about so much, that you work so hard, you make those sacrifices. So if you find yourself not doing that, it might not be a problem with you , it might be simply that you are oriented to the wrong thing. You are serving something that you don't actually care about that deeply and because we are here to serve that which we care about very deeply, this is a good development when you fail at some endeavour and then you get to decide, do I really care about it ? If you do, then you won't give up. So the initial failure can be really clarifying, you know a way t learn how committed you really are.

Doing business in the gift has been a tremendous learning process. In the past sometimes I did feel judgement toward people when they gave nothing or very little. I remember one time after a retreat a participant said, “That was amazing, that was the most powerful workshop I've ever experienced; it was way more impactful than the ten thousand dollar Tony Robbins event I did last year...” and so on and so on yet he donated maybe fifty dollars or something . I definitely felt a twinge of moral judgement – and then that twinge alerted me to the fact that I was not offering the workshop fully in the gift. Not fully in the spirit of gift. It was a form of gift, but was I really giving it as a gift ?

So this is a refinement process, where hidden motivations come to light. The results of your venture will tell you something about yourself. I also want to say, please don't apply formulaic interpretations of your successes and failures. The feedback we get from the world is mysterious and subtle. Sometimes, the healthiest response is to remember, the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.

I've just offered you a sampler of what the message might be. I gave you some examples of maybe the gift is not appropriately given maybe you are being offered a clarifying opportunity of your commitment etc, etc but sometimes the experience itself is the message, and its meaning becomes apparent only years or decades later. In fact often to jump too quickly into interpreting the events of our lives is a by pass from the experience itself . That kind of meaning making can be a way of avoiding the fullness of feeling, because you are saying something like

“Oh, the pneumonia is about my unprocessed grief, my business setback is about my not daring to fully receive.”

Maybe it is. But maybe it isn't. To fit things into neat meanings, especially dogmatically, can be a way of maintain the illusion of control, the control of fitting things into meanings which is an attempt to reduce the universe to something that fits into our own familiar categories of understanding.

This is maybe a subtle point, maybe you want to listen to that last statement a few times to really let it sink in. And to add even little more complication when I said “can be”, to fit things into neat meanings, “can be”, may be a way to maintain the illusion of control. It might not be. Sometimes we see crystal clear what the message is. It might be obvious, and sometimes we have no idea.

That condition of “I have no idea why this is happening to me” is one of the most generative states of being a person can experience. To surrender the attempt to understand, that is to understand through existing categories opens up a possibility for a new understanding and therefore for real evolution. That, I have no idea why this is happening to me, that is a hallmark of a life initiation. The shell of the world must crack before it can expand.

I realize that much of this session about gift business practices may not be relevant to many of the people listening. You might not have an occupation that could easily work by gift, or maybe you are just not include to do it that way.

And it's not a big deal, the purpose of this course is not not to persuade you to adopt some kind of gift business practice. The essence of working in the gift, again it is not how you handle money, it is in what you serve. AND, naturally and inexorably, our call to serve grows. For some of you that growth might be in the direction of working by gift. For others it might be something completely different, to practice kindness and generosity in other ways. It could be to understand your normal, in the matrix work to express other gifts in your interactions with colleagues of customers. Like there are so many ways to live in gift. To ask, how can I, and to work in gift To ask, what is the most beautiful way to express my work right now ?

Whether or not you are using a gift model of business, the basic message of this session is universally relevant. It is about those times when your gift is not reciprocated – your gift of time, work, money... even your gift of love. You give, and you don't receive in turn. Those occasions invite the kind of inquiry I have suggested.

Like was it really a gift? Was it the right gift? What is my commitment or what am I committed to and how much? It clarifies that. Because we ask such questions, we see that failure too can be a gift. Which is not to make it an escape from the pain of it, the disappointment. Because those too are part of the gift!

You can use these questions as seed questions to work with any experience that has left you feeling that your gift to the world was not received or valued or wanted. You gave so much, and did not receive in equal measure. I am not talking about situations where you were manipulated and exploited. Maybe we'll talk about those later, because they are relevant to our theme. But again, this is when you gave and it was not received. Not valued. Not wanted. Didn't work. So again the questions:

“Was it a gift?”

“Was it the right gift?”

“What is my commitment?”