

SESSION 2.2: FOLLOW-UP TO CONVERSATION WITH NIPUN METHA

Living in the Gift

Charleseisenstein.org/gift

Charles Eisenstein:

Hey everybody, I wanted to add a few thoughts to the conversation that we heard with Nipun, because I want to make it clear, or just underscore, how profound a transformation it is that comes with the orientation toward gift.

Gift is not about adding on something to "life as usual", but it is fundamental reorientation, as Nipun said – "changing the ground from which we live - the ground from which kindness comes, or skilful means, or generosity." Another way to put it is that the so-called Random Acts of Kindness are not actually random, but they come from an orientation.

When this 'shift into gift' happens, everything changes. A lot of the virtues and spiritual teachings that we might strive toward, become second nature from the field of gift. For example, Nipun talked about letting go of the outcome, or non-attachment to results. This is standard spiritual teachings and you might recognise that is really the essence of gift. We talked about that way at the beginning – the quality of release that is part of the gift. That is – what makes something into a gift – there has to be some kind of trust, some kind of release of control so that there's no guarantee of a specific return.

So you can see how someone immersed in gift culture would perhaps naturally master non-attachment, at least way more easily than we do, and how they might express various personal virtues, and we're like – "Wow, how did they become such a marvelous, wonderful person?" Well this is just what human nature becomes, immersed in a field of gift.

Of course we obviously don't have a gift culture thriving in the West, in America today, but we are getting glimpses of it that beckon us back toward – and forward toward – another way of being human.

That release of control is behind another thing that Nipun mentioned, which is – learning how to wait. When someone has faith that the gift travels in a circle according to its own mysterious logic, then that person will be content to wait. Waiting does not mean withholding action. It means acting when it is time to act, and not acting when it is not time to act. That is also what is meant by the Taoist concept of wu wei. The common translation of wu wei which is "non-action" is really misleading. It leads us into passivity or quietism, and that's not what is meant by wu wei at all. It means actually to act in accordance with the Tao. That only makes sense if there is a Tao to begin with – something that we

can act in accordance with. In other words, that there is an intelligence, or a logos, or a way to the world.

All of that deep philosophy is part of the worldview of gift.

So I'm just sort of skipping around here and highlighting some of the things Nipun said that we can think more deeply on, and work with. Another of them is the idea of "a company of noble friends", by which is meant – as Nipun explained – people who are dedicated to a noble cause. One of my favourite sayings is "enlightenment is a group activity". We might visit a new elevated state of being by grace, but we cannot stay there under our own power. Willpower alone is insufficient to maintain good behaviour. You have probably experienced that yourself. I know I have. To stay there, or even abide there occasionally, what is needed is quite simply help, or community, fellowship – and that is one of the motivations behind this course. I'm not just trying to deliver material that you then go and work with on your own, in your room, in meditation, etcetera. I really want to gather people together in a kind of community – or maybe community is a little too strong a word – but at least a fellowship, a group of people who are all attracted to the same thing.

I hope that the on-line forum and the live calls help generate a bit of that fellowship, and I know that Nipun's organisation, Service Space, strives to create the same thing. Nipun also mentioned that one of the ways we can help each other stay in a more enlightened place is simply through kindness to each other through offering ourselves in an intention of service. By each other I mean, people in this course, and yes, I also mean people who also are yearning, or intending to step more deeply into service, but I also mean everyone – everyone else in the world. And I guess I would extend that not only to people too.

So through any act of kindness, any act of generosity we discover and expand the fellowship of gift that awaits us. We establish that fellowship through kindness, and then, having established it, that fellowship then sustains us. So we bootstrap ourselves and each other into the world of gift. After all if Sister Lucy can do it, so can we. In fact we don't have to be like Sister Lucy – if we were one tenth as fearless as she is, imagine the joy and wealth we would experience. And imagine how the world would change.

However I am not exhorting you to more heroic attempts at altruism, because as I mentioned with Nipun, I am a fan of the "natural next step", not the "heroic transformation". Except sometimes. So, with that in mind, I'd like to propose a little experiment. This is also inspired by what Nipun referred to as his "little experiments". What he was actually talking to was actually radical experiments in generosity. He has a very unusual life, this man Nipun. Let's all do a little experiment. It doesn't have to be anything too radical – just something a little

beyond what you would normally do. What I'm talking about here is an act of random kindness or an act of, kind of irrational generosity.

I'll say more about it in a minute, but I just want to add that in the interests of building a community of noble comrades, I'd like you to share the inner and outer results of your acts of kindness or generosity with other people, with the people on this course, or someone else in your life.

Nipun talked about the inner ripple of a kind and generous act – how it brings a person to joy, to contentment. That inner ripple is immediate and it's reliable. You know we reliably feel joy every time we step a little further into gift. The outer ripple, the way it comes back to us through the world, is often more indirect, and more mysterious. Sometimes it does take a form that you can recognise as a direct consequence of your gift. Other times it could take years, it could take decades, who knows it could be lifetimes later. It could come as not a direct return but as in diffuse form, Colouring your life in a slightly different way. It's impossible to tell how a gift comes back. In fact that unpredictability is also part of the essence of what makes something a gift. We do not control the return. So that said, sometimes it does produce a direct or magical pay-off that takes our breath away. And we talked about this a little bit in the part I brought up about synchronicity - and that synchronicity conversation is a preview of a future segment of the course that I've got planned.

Okay, so back to the invitation about the random act of kindness or unreasonable generosity. I left out one important instruction, the crucial instruction in fact, and that is to let that act come from the ground that Nipun was talking about - the ground of love, the ground of belonging. I'm not quite sure how to put words to it, but you'll know what I mean if you listen again to the stories he told of Julio Diaz or Sister Lucy. Listen to them again and listen to the information that those stories transmit, and see how they bring you into the field of gift – the field of love – the field of compassion – the field of kindness – the field of belonging. That's the ground I'm referring to, the ground of belonging to the universe. To be held in the hand of God. That is the source that we would like to invite our just-beyond-normal foray into gift to come from. We want it to come from that field.

So the seed sentence this time comes along with an intention. The intention is to commit a beyond-normal act of selfless kindness or generosity. Something that you ordinarily wouldn't think to do. Something that breaks precedent. Something that is maybe normally a little scary. But this time it won't be, because you will be doing it from a field of love, from a field of gratitude.

To prep that, close your eyes for a minute, and recall what you felt, in fact what you knew, from those stories. Bring yourself back there - that violent teenage

boy slapping the cook...and Sister Lucy comes. "I love you," she says, and he melts into tears – and he's changed forever.

Or that mugger. "Hey kid it's cold out, why don't you take my jacket?" Feel that part of you that would do the same thing – that fearless part of you – that fearless part of you. Feel that. It is there. There it is. That part of you, unquestioningly generous. And now, sink into that part of you and really inhabit that part. Feel the power current running through you – the power current of fearless generosity that can heal the world. And fully in this feeling, say to yourself – "I stand on the ground of love." "I stand on the ground of love." And let that be your mantra for the next few days, and each time you repeat it, feel what you're feeling now.

"I stand on the ground of love." "I stand on the ground of love".

This will be the source of your gift.

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