

Session 4: 2 – Follow-up to Conversation with Claudio Miranda  
Living in the Gift  
[Charleseisenstein.org/gift](http://Charleseisenstein.org/gift)

Hi everyone,

I would like to go through the conversation with Claudio and pull out a few key ideas to work with. It is amazing the things that become so clear from his perspective and that are so easily lost in modern society. To see oneself, it helps to have perspectives from the outside, from other people but especially from outside of our own culture.

So Claudio comes from a place where gift economy is a daily reality. If one subscribed to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, then one would think that you wouldn't find a lot of purpose and self-actualization going on in Favela de Pas. Because people are too busy meeting their base needs, they are too busy surviving, right? But that isn't what happens. As Claudio says thousands of projects are underway there in service to life.

So anyway, let me name a couple of the things that Claudio helps me to see. One of them, well he said, "*We do not expect. We only dream. We live each day toward the dream.*" And what does that mean? I think what he's getting at here is an approach to life that is not about control. We do not expect. We only dream. Yet being in this state of trust is not a recipe for inaction. We live each day toward the dream. In that orientation, right action is clear. The dream, what he means, or what it serves as, is an orienting pole star that can guide our steps. We don't know how to get there but we still are drawn to that beacon and knowing that is this step toward that or away from that without controlling the results and how we're going to get there.

On a similar line he says, "*We never buy things when we want them. They come to us when they do.*" Here we can see how meeting our needs with money bring us into a mentality of control. With money, I am in control, in control of what comes to me and when it comes to me. That is relatively new for humanity. Hunter-gatherers they could go out and find things they wanted to some degree, to a greater degree they were not in control. They could not determine the movement of the herds, they could not control the seasons of the plant foods so they had to take what was available, what was given to them by the environment. And the same was true, to a large extent, for Agrarian people who could not use money to source out-of-season foods. They couldn't say "I want an orange now, I want an apple now and tomorrow we are going to have this". They were also dependent on what was provided to them by nature even though they were partner with nature and participating in the providing of things, and of course had to do work, had to take a step towards "the dream", let's say of having a full belly. Yet to a much greater extent than we are with money, they were in a state of gift. For them, as for Claudio, it was true that *they come to us when they do*. So you can see how living in those conditions might induce an attitude of trust more

generally beyond just the things that we buy with money. But an attitude of trust, *they come to us when they do*. “They” meaning everything. Along with the attitude of trust comes an attitude of gratitude because what I have *came to me*. I didn’t force it to come. It was a gift.

Conventional economics is based on force. I have something you need, and I withhold it until you pay me. So I am kind of forcing the money from you because I have something that you need, I have leverage over you, and then when I get the money then I can force the world to give me what I want. If I have enough money, the world basically cannot say no, or so it seems. I am in charge here. Of course, this is only true of the things that have fallen into the money realm, there is still a lot money cannot buy and in fact as we go into more in this course the things that we really want, on a deep level, money often allows us the illusion or the counterfeit of what we really need. But that for now is a separate issue, at least it does give us the illusion that I can have whatever I want, if I only have enough money I can have what I want. So the basic mindset of “I’m in charge” holds, or even, “I need more money so I will be more in control.” When you have no money, then you are of necessity in a state of trust. I remember experiencing a bit of this when I was in financial poverty about ten years ago. There I was, with a bunch of unpaid bills and three children and like ten dollars in my bank account, and no way of knowing how I was going to pay the heating bill, or whatever bill, and then some money comes in, and it’s not enough to pay everything and get me in the clear but it will be enough to pay just one thing. So I would just pay whatever bill was the most urgent, and leave the others for another day and kind of not worry about them because worrying did not do any good. There they were, regardless, so I became very much more into the present, my time horizon shortened and I became much more a person of the moment. I see this happening to people when they have a life-threatening illness or perhaps a terminal illness, it could be something in a relationship, anything that dispels the illusion of control. When that is dispelled we enter a sometimes a state of helplessness, a state of trust out of necessity. So that is why we might have something to learn from people in favelas and refugee camps. And from the dying. And anyone whose world has fallen apart, is falling apart, and they have come to terms with that, they have come to accept that and they are not in a place of I’m going to try and hang on to what is and control it.

Really this wisdom is available from anyone who has really integrated the inevitability of death. That is why so many cultures valued their elders. An elder is someone who knows he’s gonna die. I mean we all have an intellectual knowledge that we’re gonna die but to really know it, to really know we’re gonna die. Stephen Jenkinson asks, “*Why is it in our own culture are there so many old people and so few real elders?*” The reason, in short, is because our culture hides and denies death, worshipping instead youth and safety and the illusion of permanence and control. Well I’ve gone a little bit beyond the scope of this course, though maybe later we will go into the gift of death later on. Right now I will just point out that living in a gift culture brings us directly to various spiritual teachings about trust, flow, and the present moment and impermanence. Maybe,

in a culture like that we don't even need spiritual teachings of that kind. Maybe they only become necessary as the way of society diverges from the truth of those teachings. When it diverges from gift in the economic realm, then it is almost inevitable that we diverge from its corollary truths in the spiritual realm. And I guess that might be another way of saying that our spiritual state is so deeply connected to our social, political and economic state. These are not some separate realm. Yes you can cultivate spirituality in conditions that contradict the spiritual teachings but in that case spiritual practice really is a struggle and don't we also want to change the environment that could bring us more easily into a more spiritual state and that's not to say to all live in a favela but what could gift culture look like if it is not forced upon us but when it is chosen.

There were so many beautiful words in the conversation with Claudio. Ah, one of them I just loved *"The good musician is the one who makes the others play well."* What would our organizations look like if we could take that to heart? Or how about *"If you look at too much stuff, look at less. If you talk too much, talk less, listen more."* This wisdom is not coming from books, I don't think they have a lot of books in the favela, it is what we can know in the context of gift.

One more thing that illustrates the perceptions of gift culture was in the story he told about his father. The nine year old boy goes to his father saying he wants to be a musician. And his father, does he ask, "How will you make a living playing music?" No. He tells his son that his music is for doing good in the world. Yes, you do that and you will do good in the world with that. I don't know if you have had the experience of seeing a career guidance counselor at school but it is really quite the opposite of what Claudio's father said. If you are good at art maybe the guidance counselor can say "Well you to go into advertising or design". If you are pretty good at math, they might tell you "Oh you to be an accountant". The whole conversation is how you can monetize this gift. How you can sell the gift. And that programming in this culture runs very deep. I've noticed embarrassing vestiges of that mentality myself interacting with my sons when they were teenagers. Jimi was writing video games, and apps and things like that and there I am thinking, great, how can he monetize that? From within a culture where I stand and most of us stand, it takes some presence of mind to speak from the place Claudio's father spoke from. I did my best but who knows maybe some of my anxiety broke through, the anxiety of being immersed in a system of artificial scarcity. But from Claudio's perspective a context where well-being so obviously depends on the gifts of others, it is obvious also that our purpose in life is to contribute our gifts to the well-being of others. This doesn't need to be a spiritual teaching, because in that environment it is a fact of life. For us maybe it needs to be a teaching or maybe not even a teaching for us because there is a deep part of ourselves that remembers so maybe we just need some reminding. And that's why I love these stories of generosity because they can help us remember, they are a reminders of knowledge that we have already have, awakeners of a knowledge we already have.

Claudio said, another thing I found very insightful: *"If you look outside, you will be manipulated by a system that doesn't work anymore."* He is contrasting that

with looking inside for what you came here to do in the world. When we lose touch with that, which is our essential sovereignty, what we came here to do in the world, that is your essential sovereignty, when we lose touch with that, when we lose touch with “here’s what I am doing in the world, here’s why I am here” then we are losing touch of our essential sovereignty over our lives and then we are being manipulated maybe we have the feeling of not living our own lives, but instead living the life we are paid to live or bribed to live or forced to live. But not my life. That’s the type of life I am talking about manipulated by these outside forces coercion, threat and bribery So, I just want to point out there that being in gift does not make us push-overs, always accommodating everything and no, it makes us sovereign over our lives

There is so much we could work with from this interview, but for our seed sentence I would like to I return to Claudio’s father. That story came up when I asked Claudio how did you learn the meaning of generosity? ‘Everything he has, he gives,’ he said. And maybe you know someone like that too, someone who, at least for a moment or an occasion or for part of their lives did the same. Everything he has, he gives. Or could be, everything she has, she gives. Do you know someone like that? I am thinking in this moment of my former mother-in-law, Patsy’s deceased mother, we called her Ama, she was an old Taiwanese lady whose, when I knew her at least, maybe it was different when she was younger but when I knew her , her sole purpose in life, it seemed, was to give anything and everything she had those she loved. Without hesitation. And I think of her and others are coming to mind as well. So close your eyes and see who it might be for you. Everything she has, she gives. Everything he has, he gives. Who’s coming to you? Picture that person and feel that person and maybe bring to mind a particular act or moment in which that generosity was demonstrated. Everything she has, she gives. And make a link in your mind between this sentence and this person and maybe that moment. Repeat it again, with the image and feeling of that person and that moment. And over the next few days, repeat the invocation from time to time. In this moment picture yourself, picture yourself calling that person in through that sentence, calling in their image, picture yourself doing this from time to time. And know that calling that person in will feed the best part of you. And with the awe and gratitude at this person’s generosity. Open your eyes. You may also want to share a story of this person on our online forum because hearing these stories also feeds and nourishes the best part of ourselves. So if you have a moving story to share please do that.

Thank you so much and goodbye till next time.