

Session 5: Crowdcast Q&A with Charles
Living in the Gift
Charleseisenstein.net/gift

Welcome everybody to our first live call for Living in the Gift. Before I really launch in I will introduce some other members of the team:

We have Laurie Young who is the main person who's been coordinating and logistifying and pretty much doing way more work than me, to make this course happen. Most of the customer service, to setting up systems, and anyway.. she's kinda the mama bear for the course.

We have Jason Guille who is a expert at Crowdcast, which is the technology we're using right here and who has graciously and generously been helping us make this technology work.

Marie Goodwin who is doing the community, some of the deep community holding behind the scenes in this course, you probably recognize her from the Facebook group if you're on that.

And then there's Patsy, Patsy Eisenstein, my dear ex-wife who will be doing offline answering questions, if anyone has questions like that, like you can't get on or something. I heard a rumor, that "Charles is going through a divorce?" ...that someone on the course thought that. Patsy and I have been divorced for like, 10 years. And our relationship is just awesome. So, rest assured that we aren't going through a divorce.

So, maybe I'll turn it over to Laurie now for a few housekeeping things and then I'll start looking at the questions.

LY: Hi everybody, it's good to see you. Glad to be live, finally! A lot of people actually just joined the course in the last few days. So I'm just going to go through a few things about this session for those of you who are just coming on. You may not know that you can ask a question. Down at the bottom of the screen, there's just a button; it's pretty self-explanatory. You can do that. You can also upvote the other questions that of are interest to you, and we'll be inviting audience members on for some of the questions; Charles is going to let you know more about how to do that when we get to that part of the broadcast. And you can also always have conversations or ask questions in chat; Marie is going to be over there helping with what you need. Jason will be there too to help if some tech things come up that we don't know about. We are recording this obviously, it's going to be available immediately after we finished in this exact space. So all you'll have to do when it's finished or if you're coming back later is click the exact same link, when you come here you'll see the recording. Those are the main things, it's a pretty simple technology so I hope you have a good experience.

Other than that I just want to say, as we all know we're coming up on the holiday break and that will give the new people a chance to catch up and the rest of you a chance to relax and integrate this and enjoy family. Charles will say more about that later but we will be resuming on January 6th. So that's the housekeeping that I have. Over to you, Charles

CE: Alright great, thanks Laurie. So first, as Laurie was saying, some people are new to the course, we've had people been signing up over the last 24 hours. You might feel a little lost in the woods or left behind because we have traversed some territory, but I think you'll step into the frequency of the course just by being on this call and then you can go back and listen to some of the earlier materials.

So I am going to go through questions. One thing I realized when we tried out this technology is if I don't have an actual person, and I'm just looking at the question and answering it, it feels like this kinda depersonalized 'ask the expert' thing and so much more is communicated with voice and facial expression than can be conveyed in just text. And I feel like I'm talking to a real person. So that's why, for at least some of the questions, I want to invite either the person who wrote the question, or if not, a proxy. So, if your question was uploaded and it's pretty high in the rankings, then there's a really good chance that we are going to call on you. You don't have to do it, someone else can do it for you, but it's just so I have a person to interact with and so that the next step of the question can come out as well. So it's not just me providing information but it's a little bit of a dialogue, and that's how the emergent question can come up. And the emergent information.

So with that, I will go to the questions here!

So yeah, the first one, if everyone knows how to do that you just hit the Ask a Question button on the bottom. I'm gonna start with the LifeCoach one, so it's the second one. I wish I knew how to say this name! Gijsbert? This Dutch name here, I'm going to come to that soon. First though, I wanted to talk to the.. boy, the order is changing here! The first one I was gonna look at was the one that says, "as a life coach..." Oh now I can't find that one! Well, what I was going to say about that one: this question of working in the gift, and charging fees, or not charging fees, all that kinda stuff. That's such a big issue that we're devoting an entire session to that. So I'm not going to go into that one on this call because that will come up later, a whole session on it and then we can talk about it in the live call following that session.

So the first person I wanted to bring up was Rena. So, Laurie maybe you can find Rena and see if she's here and willing to come up. The question was, "This probably isn't time yet in the course, but at some time I'd like to address boundaries and the tendency to give too much. Speaking as someone with 2 out of 3 primary relationships at least somewhat co-dependent, maybe even extremely codependent, but you'd probably have to ask someone else."

I'm sure a lot of people can resonate with this question, there's this side sometimes that living in the gift means stepping more into self-sacrifice; giving more and receiving less so that therefore you are a 'better person,' a 'more worthy person,' a 'less greedy person.' So you can be seen as a good person.
Oh, hi. Hey, Rena. There you are.

Rena: Hey

CE: So do you want to maybe review that question or maybe ask it, reframe it or ask it in your...?

Rena: Well that wasn't actually my question, that was a question I responded to.

CE: Oh, really?

Rena: And I found the life coach question, it somehow got moved to 'answered questions.'

CE: Okay, well thank you for that. We are still working on mastering this technology. So, 0 for 2 so far. So back to the question of boundaries and over-giving.

Rena: Yeah, that was mine. Not the life coach one.

CE: Oh, that was the one I was hoping to bring you up to talk about. The life coach one is for another session.

Rena: Okay, so I had just wanted to address, it came up in the group also, the... I've found myself often in situations where I'm torn because I feel that's what needed is so much more than what I'm able to give. I'm experiencing it with family members. Two family members; my husband is showing definite signs of early dementia and, you know, definitely losing the ability to give much back. And, looking like maybe is going to be needing way more from me and, how am I going to maintain, not even maintain; he's also a hoarder. So my own space has become a difficult issue. It's gotten worse lately, it didn't used to be as bad as it is. So just, the borders are...

CE: Right. Okay, so there's a lot there!

Rena: Yeah, there is. And that's only half of it. Because he's one of two. But sometimes, we keep trying to give and give and give and I think sometimes at least I have the problem that I'm overdoing it.

CE: Yeah. And so, in the question you originally put up there too you also mentioned co-dependency and over-giving. And one thing that came to me when I read that question was that idea that a give comes from a place of sovereignty. So, if you're in a relationship where you are afraid not to give, where you're afraid, or you're giving because bad things will happen to you if you don't give... that's not actually from a

place a gift. Like paying your taxes. When I pay my income taxes it's not like, 'I am giving this gift to the government because I love the government.' No, I am acknowledging that this is not a gift. This is something being coerced out of me in some way. I'm not saying don't do that young lady, if you don't pay your taxes bad things will happen to you. There is such a thing as coercion in this world, and in relationships sometimes there is psychological coercion. For many people, in this economy, in this social set-up, there is genuine valid fear of what's going to happen if I stop 'giving' to... I'm not saying this is your situation, I'm generalizing it and generalizing it for patriarchal society. Like, what's gonna happen, especially for women, what bad thing is gonna happen to me if I stop giving in the way that I'm giving and don't really want to give.

So, simply to recognize that this is not being in 'gift.' That recognition then gives birth to changes. It doesn't necessarily provide easy solutions; some people are in really difficult situations, feeling trapped, and then to identify what form is this coercion taking and how much of it depends on my maintaining predictability, control, a positive self-image... that's where codependency comes in. Like, you give and give and give and what do you get in return? Well, you get the other persons' validation, and the other persons' approval. So there is actually an exchange going on sometimes, where you're exchanging care-taking for approval, or something like that.

So, I'm not gonna try to psychoanalyze you but there's..

Rena: Yeah, I think sometimes it's not approval, at least in my two cases, I also have a daughter who has needed an incredible amount of very difficult support and there was a definite fear that she would end up on the streets or back at home, so sometimes it's just, yeah, everything is really going to fall apart if I don't hold it together.

CE: Yeah, and I'm definitely not saying to stop doing that. You know, this is not the easy solution course where you creatively visualize or affirm something that's contrary to the facts. But it's about noticing things that you haven't noticed before. I'm not sure what else I can say about it. This maybe addresses some of the other question down there, too: living in the gift is not, either you're doing it or you're not. The course is about identifying the next step into gift, the next step that is natural, organically arising from wherever you are, maybe a little bit daring but not necessarily heroic, not this dislocating departure and/or escape from the situation that you're facing right now. It's an opening up of a new step. Part of that comes from sitting with, "what do I want to give?" "What do I not want to give? What am I ready to give, what am I not ready to give?" Where am I? What of my needs aren't met? That's another one we're going to be working with, sometimes I get confused where we've been and where we're still going because I'm making material in advance but, "what is the unmet need?" What is the unmet need underneath greed? That was another question down on the list that I'm going to get to. So, yeah. Thank you Rena for bringing this up.

Rena: Thank you for addressing it also. I think it's a very important piece, not trying to push ourselves into gift because 'that's where we're supposed to be.'

CE: Yes, necessary to counteract that go-to. It's not about being a good person. It's just a shift of perception that brings all kinds of benefits, unexpected benefits. And brings more power, flow, synchronicity.

One of the later sessions is on synchronicity, that's going to be really cool. Hopefully I'm going to collect some very cool stories for y'all. Thanks, Rena. Let me go back to the questions here.

The next one I wanted to go to was Nell. Trying to find Nell, Nell Parker. If we can find Nell, if she's on the call, that'd be cool.

So Nell said, "I feel like I've been living in the gift at least partially for a long time. Living on less money, caring for young children and seniors, doing volunteer work and activism, making art that people love but don't want to pay for. But I still have nothing like what Claudio Miranda describes. I lack synchronicity and abundance. A lot of the time my life feels like a struggle and help does not come to me. What am I doing wrong? Am I not giving enough? Am I not asking for what I need? Nell is this you?"

NP: Yes, I'm here.

CE: Thanks for coming on. Do you want to elaborate a little bit, or convey the

NP: I'm nervous. Yeah, I was just so moved by the conversation with Claudio and it's just incredible, and I just feel like his stories are amazing, and, how can we make that? I feel like I'm living with that partially but it also feels like a struggle and, just his stories of synchronicity, I'm glad we're going to get into that more, the synchronicity, the feeling of abundance, the feeling of community... I feel stuck. I feel like I'm trying and maybe partly there but, it was so amazing and so moving.

CE: Yeah, thank you. He's a dear soul, that Claudio.

So one reason I wanted to bring him into the course is precisely to address what you were saying, what am I doing wrong? Because hearing his stories we understand that his culture, his setting, his life in a certain way, he has more wealth than we do in this society. Therefore, it's not that you're doing something wrong, it's that you are living in conditions of poverty. Maybe not as much material poverty as they have, but a social poverty. Just recognizing, so when we recognize that poverty and we recognize what the nature of the wealth is that he has, then at least we know what's missing. At least we don't blame ourselves and at least maybe we can identify a path back to that wealth. Or if not a path back, because actually I don't even know the path, but I do know the step. The step toward more connection. So, maybe the step back is recognizing what is exactly this wealth.

It's the wealth of interdependency, of people needing each other, depending on each other. The community grows from gifts.

So, yeah, I'm not going to say that you should give more. I don't know what you should do. Maybe it's about receiving more. I don't know your situation or your psychology but it could be willingness to receive, which goes contrary to our cultural conditioning. Part of our cultural conditioning is, "I'm supposed to earn it." Part of our cultural conditioning is, "I'm supposed to be independent." If I'm receiving, if I'm depending on people for my wellbeing, then I'm not independent, am I? And I'm owing them something, I'm in debt to other people. So I'd rather be the giver and have everyone in debt to me but not receive. And so for some people that's it, too. And it is about, not to use a new-age cliché but, opening to receive. It could be that. And, how do you do that?

It's identifying, what are the barriers to receiving? What is the fear to receiving? What is the dependency that you might have on identifying with being someone who gives more than receives, someone who does more than her share, so then you are valid in the world. It could be all kinds of stuff like that.

NP: I liked what he said about listening.

CE: If you talk a lot: say less, listen more

NP: Yeah, but I think listening to your heart and listening to the world.

CE: Yeah. And this is another thing related to also what Rena and I were talking about, what is actually a gift and what is being forced or coerced from you? Through maybe subtle psychological mechanisms that may not even have anything to do with the people you are giving to, they could be things that are implanted in you by your parents years ago. Or maybe you're younger than 50 but in my case, 50 years ago that I'm not doing it really out of gift, I'm doing it in order to feel good about myself in order to alleviate gift. So that's not gift. For a lot of people, coming into gift might mean, in quotes, "giving less." But then when you do give, then it's really coming from the heart.

And I guess I could add one more subtlety to that: gifts are always part of a, gifts are a social lubricant and a way of maintaining relationships. I don't want to make it seem like some gifts are true gifts and other gifts are not true gifts. I think usually there's mixed motives in that. So, this is not about purifying your motives. But just being present to what the motives are. How do you feel coerced and how do you feel free? How are you dependent emotionally on an identity that's associated with who you are as a giver? And to refer back to Rena, what arrangement, what relational arrangement is this gift part of?

So, just to notice these things. Yeah, I hope that's helpful.

Thanks. So yeah, should we move onto the next person? Okay.

I kinda had prepared in advance a flow here and now things are getting uploaded, so let's see. Here we are back to Gijsbert? So, maybe we should bring him on to correct my pronunciation if we can find him.

I'll just read it while we look and see if he's here:

"I think it is true for most of us that the model of living in the gift as a way of living and working seems to me, and already for so long, the only reasonable way to go...

Gijsbert: Hi.

CE: Hi. Can you tell me how to say your name?

Gijsbert: Hies-bert. It's a Dutch name.

CE: Yeah, I thought it was Dutch. Okay, so maybe you want to re-ask the question?

G: Yeah, the thing is, in my life and in my doings I've always felt like, so much to give. It's almost like a natural thing to do, and a natural way of being. And, in so many ways it has been discouraged and like, the lid on the nose (??) kind of experience. And so, the question actually is, why is it that, of course I'm projecting now, so many people have that innate willingness to give and there's not a platform to do that? A platform to really connect and share, especially not in my world, at this point. I have so many talents that I would love to share and give and give for free, somehow the receiving end is missing.

CE: Yeah. I think the answer to that question is thousands of years old. Or thousands of years in the making. I'm creating material in the course about the basic structure of the economic system and why certain gifts are not rewarded. Basically our monetary system gives money to people who create more goods and services that are quantifiable and therefore easily monetizable and can be bought and sold in a marketplace. The money goes to those who contribute toward the expansion of the world of paid goods and services. So if what you want to offer people does not contribute to that, then it's going to be a lot harder to make money in this economy. Our value system, let me know if I'm on the wrong track here, this may be a bit too abstract, but our value system tends to see and value and validate those things that are measurable. Those things that are quantifiable. So, things like leisure, music, art, anything that doesn't make a product isn't seen. Like taking care of children, taking care of old people, taking care of sick people. The humble, invisible, feminine functions of society tend not to be rewarded as much, not to be even appreciated or seen as valuable. And it's also a part... maybe I'll stop there for a second. I want you to reorient me here, maybe say a bit more.

Gijsbert: Yes, what I was referring to actually is, in my profession as an architect I feel like there is so much quality that could be added to our world and I'm a strong believer of that, but there is no reception for it. There's almost no understanding or, it seems to be, sort of filtered out of our society as a whole, the urge or the longing

for beauty, for example. Or the true feeling of enclosure. I think a lot of community comes from the way we enclose ourselves, and the way we organize our cities and our villages and everything. A beautiful example is the porch, which is a space between the outer world and the inner world. And in most houses you have the front door and you're gone, there's no exchange anymore.

CE: This is very much in line with the answer I was working on before with you. Beauty is one of these things that is unquantifiable. So in a society obsessed with the measurable, we have architects having incentives to build as fast and as cheaply as possible, to have as many square meters of floor space as possible, and to look acceptable so you add some decorations. But as for buildings that will look beautiful through and through, that might take double the time, double the labor to make it really beautiful? We can't afford that. There's no budget to make it better than it has to be for the purpose.

Gijsbert: True, but don't you think that the value is just in that?

CE: Yeah. So this is a kind of poverty. This is one of the forms of artificial scarcity that we have. This entire built-landscape where every building is ugly. Here we are, after 5,000 years of architecture.

Gijsbert: so, how to live that gift in a world like that?

CE: Yeah. If you want to take it back to the world of work and money you're gonna have to find people who will give you money even though they are not going to benefit in any quantifiable way. So if someone is commissioning a building and you say, well we could build it efficiently and cheaply and it will have good metrics: good energy efficiency, it will have lots of floor space and the appropriate height of ceilings and it will meet all of the design specifications, and it will cost 10 million euro. Or, we could build it so beautifully, it'll cost 20 million euro, you won't be able to monetize that extra beauty as higher rent, it will be a money-loser for you but it will be really beautiful. And if that person has that value then maybe he will pay more. Society used to organize around that. Beauties used to be way more beautiful than they needed to be for their function. But for somebody to pay for that, then they're gonna have to go against their economic self-interest. Maybe they need a certain return on their investment to meet their creditors. They need a certain return. So we are all trapped in this system, where every single person in the system has this heart yearning to do the work I am here to do as beautifully as I can do it, satisfying that internal imperative for the work; better than it has to be for the market, better than it has to be for the teacher, better than it has to be for the grade. I wanna do it right, I wanna do it well. I want to serve the fulfillment of what this building, or what this object, or what this thing wants to be. That's what I want. Every single person has that yearning, yet we have a system that almost universally discourages that. This is the dilemma we're in right now. Work as gift to the world, I wanna make a gift of my work to God, I wanna make a gift of my work to the world.

Gijsbert: In my case, I have a hard time not doing it. And so, I'm like, put aside because I'm too expensive or too, this and that. And so, the question is, and of course you don't have an answer to that, is how can we step over that boundary and create that value again?

CE: Yeah, so there is a systemic necessity for change and there's also the internal system that has been put into us through our education that; partly, at least for me, that objective external circumstances are telling me that I can't do this. But there's also part of myself that resonates with them. And holds back and is unwilling to; suppose somebody says, we're just going to pay you to make things as beautiful as you want. There's part of me, maybe this is in you, too, that wants to justify it. That doesn't feel fully comfortable living in gift, living in receiving from other people even though I'm not going to give them anything back that's going to make them as much money. Like, I'm a charity case, then. There was a question farther down the list about patronage. Saying that Michelangelo, Leonardo, all these guys had wealthy patrons. And they needed patrons because they were not meeting quantifiable needs. They weren't painting buildings to protect them from weather or something like that. And I think ultimately, as a civilization, we need to move back to a patronage model where those in society who are producing quantifiable things subsidize everybody else because our values have expanded beyond those things. So, internally what you can do in this situation is to look and ask, "How can I be a carrier of these new values? How can I speak to other people that arouses their desire for these things and to contribute to a beautiful environment? And in what ways am I reluctant to fully step into it?"

Gijsbert: Your books, your philosophy is all about this, and yet we are sort of, it's so hard to engage in this world with that value.

CE: Yeah, you're speaking to this loneliness that so many of us feel. Probably everybody on this course. Like, I have these gifts and the world doesn't want them! Doesn't anyone else see this? Doesn't anyone else think that it's crazy? This is a good thing! Am I alone here? Am I an alien? The paradox is, almost everyone feels that on some level.

Gijsbert: And then the doubt, the self-doubt, should I just step down and please the world?

CE: Right. And maybe sometimes you do step down and please the world, but that's not coming from self-doubt. That is maybe what I would like to offer through this course, is maybe it's from necessity. Maybe there is no dishonor in going out and getting a job at Walmart if you need to feed your kids. I'm not going to tell anybody that they're doing a bad thing. I was in that place in my life not that many years ago! Where I was like, okay, my kids are not gonna go hungry for my ideals. I'm not that proud. So there's no dishonor in that, but if that compromise is coming from self-doubt then there's some evolution that can happen. And so, what I wanna do here is

collectively affirm that part of ourselves that's like, "no, this IS why I'm here." We're not crazy here. We are born for this.

Gijsbert: Thanks, that's great.

CE: Thank you for having the patience to go through this.

Gijsbert: Thank you Charles for your encouragement, thanks.

CE: So I'm going to look at the questions now and see what's next.

Some good ones here. Let's see, this one's got so many votes I should probably look at this one.

Oh this one: "What's the most beautiful thing that could emerge from our group as a gift? Is there a way we could collectively bound a service from our beautiful world as soon as possible?" I'm just going to quickly say that I have been thinking about that. Is there some way that we can organize? Originally I had ideas like maybe we could identify some really worthy thing and all give a bit of money but I feel like there's more potential than that. And this is part of the community-building function that Marie Goodwin is stewarding here and something that we're thinking a lot about, not only in regards to this course but to our whole... I don't want to use the word community yet because I don't think we have something yet that qualifies for that status, but the network, or the coherence that's coming around the ideas I've been putting out into the world. Marie and I are talking about how to bring more coherence and more community, local meet-ups and things like that. And something, for lack of a better word, more 'organized.' But I like coherent better. And then collective gifts to the world can emerge from that.

It felt a little gimmicky for me to say, "ok now we're all going to put some funds together to support this thing," but that is a question that's been stewing in the back of my mind, so thank you for bringing that up.

So. There's a bunch of questions here, here's Deb about more about Charles' story birthing the Center of Humanity. There were a couple other questions further down, here's another one from Mertie.

Welcome everybody to our first live call for Living in the Gift. Before I really launch in I will introduce some other members of the team:

Mertie "I don't have retirement plan, savings."

I can't remember if I was going to do this later in the course or not. Just for the sake of having another human to talk to, is Mertie here? We could invite her on. And if not, Autumn Calquist who responded to that with a very affirmative comment.

CE: Hi Mertie, you're on.

Mertie: Oh, hi. Hi, Charles. Yeah, I'm a bit older than you so I think about these things. I gave up working real jobs to take care of old people; first my mother and now other people's mothers. Yeah, so I think about that because, yeah... what happens 10 years from now when I'm a lot older?

CE: Right, so that's a good question. For those of you who've read Sacred Economics I talk about the principle of non-accumulation: which is that I don't invest, I don't accumulate more money than I need for more than, you know, a few months' expenses. So I'm not saving for retirement or anything like that. And partly that's because most of my income is from gifts of various sorts, like from this course for example, or from retreats that I give that I do on the same gift model as this course is done and so, if someone's giving me money it doesn't feel right to hoard it, you know? Because they could be hoarding it instead! Why should I hoard it instead of them? It feels kinda weird to say, "Oh yes, thank you" and then keep it. So, I'm not saying, okay everybody, you do this, too because then you get to count as a good person. I'm not trying to offer a model so much, unless that's something that calls to you, too. And so I'm offering more of a permission that it's okay and safe to do this, if that is what you are called to do. So it's not really prescriptive, and I think it's kind of a bit unique to my circumstances. I feel like, people will take care of me when I'm older. I'm also not saying to never save money. Let's be realistic, if you say you want to buy a house or a car or something, maybe you need to save up money to do that. But that's a different matter than saving money as a general, for a rainy day, basically to buy security. Because it's not actually a very reliable form of security, it's not actually a secure form of security, as many people in Greece for example, in Latin America are discovering when their pension fund that was supposed to support them in their old age gets looted through austerity or some other thing, or their savings disappears in hyper-inflation or gets confiscated. We could be having that, too if there's a financial collapse. It's not actually good security. Better security is to have given generously to people, to community, and a financial crash cannot erase that bank account, that bank account of gratitude. And that's stepping into, 'we're all in this together.' And to step into 'we're all in this together,' the first step is to give people that experience of, 'yeah, I'm in this with you.' So maybe I do this way out of selfishness. Giving out of selfishness. You know, the security that we get out of having a big bank account and lots of investments is a substitute for real security, the kind of security that Claudio has, and that is the security of belonging. And we're missing that in this society and we're desperately hungry to belong. Desperate. So, I don't blame anyone for finding whatever substitute for belonging is available. This is compassion. All the things that we judge, they are coming from a wound, you know? They are coming from a poverty. And if we want them to stop... and then they become self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating. And if we want them to stop, instead of blaming, and condemning, and asking what's wrong with us, let's look at the circumstances. And maybe if we address the circumstances, the fight can end.

Mertie: If I choose to not participate in that system then I feel like that is one step I can do to help something else birth itself. But I always feel dilemmas around that, because I'm sure fear enters the picture. You know, the system that says you should

save for your retirement and invest your money, all of that. That system is part of the whole issue, part of the whole problem. I mean, is that part of it? Choosing to not participate in that? If enough of us do that, does that suck the life out of that system enough that hopefully something changes?

CE: Well, as a social movement, I think that the most potent form of collective action would be, I call it a debt-strike. Which means people stop making their debt payments on their credit cards, mortgages, student loans or whatever. And if enough people stop doing that the financial system disintegrates. That's, maybe in the digital age, the only form of people power that is still available to us. So that's what I would say to that. Otherwise, if it's not a mass movement, no one's gonna care if you personally are struggling to survive in your old age. So I think that this non-participation also comes naturally as a natural form of repulsion, and it's also the product of different priorities.

So for me, partly it's just that I have other priorities. If I have extra money, I'm gonna wanna give it to something that moves me, or give it to somebody in need. It just feels in the moment more compelling to me. Retirement? Yeah, whatever! I'll be fine. This may not even be a healthy thing. I'm just honestly explaining what it is for me. And maybe this whole thing, this beautiful principle of non-accumulation, maybe that's just the way I justify my irresponsible attitudes and happy-go-lucky, people will take care of me, and I'm not being responsible. And this is one of the narratives, "I'm not responsible, for myself and for my children. I'm gonna be a burden to them," and all that kinda stuff. There's a logic to this. And I think really what's happening is that, that was true. That was a true story for many decades in middle America. If you were poor and black or Native American, totally different story. But if you were White, middle class or upper-middle class, that was the appropriate life to live. That was the story of the American Life and here's how you do it. If you were in that particular tribe of humanity, there was a certain morality and ethics that go along with it, and to live a proper life almost from a Confucian stand-point of, 'live well the life and station that is given to you.' Like, that's what you did. You made responsible investments, you got life insurance because of course you wouldn't want to leave your family in the lurch if you passed away. And that was part of an entire system of stable, secure employment that originated in the bright young person wanting to contribute to the grand project of civilization. And if you did that were rewarded. Because the grand project of civilization was still healthy and robust. And attractive. And all of that is falling apart. That whole life trajectory that ends with a well-funded retirement is also falling apart, and we are not attracted to it. Generation X and below, that's me, generation X, we're not attracted to that anymore. Even if rationally, many people, out of fear accept that 'oh, I better save for retirement...' I think this is true, maybe it's just me and the echo chamber that I've built around myself, but that story of a life is no longer viable. Even if you try, you still can't do it. Yeah, those are just some thoughts on it.

Mertie: Thank you.

CE: I guess if saving for retirement feels like a gift to yourself and feels secretly good to you, then maybe you should do it. Again, this is not about forcing ourselves into a place of generosity. It's, what are we attracted to when we take in new information? When we take in the information from Claudio, from Nipun, these stories. What happens to us? How does that change our configuration? What are we now attracted to? What parts of ourselves as givers come out? And the decisions we make that seemed like moral decisions we now recognize as symptoms of an internal change. This is one of the big, maybe meta-ideas here: letting go of the fight. Including the fight to be a good person, the fight against the self. And what happens when you let go of the fight? How does change happen when you're not fighting for it? It comes as a gift. And that doesn't mean inaction, it doesn't mean to just wait for stuff to happen. It is an active step into giving and receiving that comes from, it's an embracing of a change that's ongoing, and giving attention to the readiness and the willingness for that change to happen. Maybe I'm going on too long with this thing, I'll just finish by saying, more than the ego would like to think, our development is something that is given to us. It is being given to us now. It's happening now. So let us be grateful for that and say yeah, we don't even have to take credit for it. It's a free gift. The universe is generous. And we take that in and then, how generous do we become? And how fearless do we become when we see how held we are? So thank you, Mertie.

I think that after this, I really want to go to a question about privilege. That would be a good follow-up to this. Here we are. This was Sarah Lucas: "How do we introduce the gift economy to folks with less financial privilege?" Let's see if we can find Sarah here. This seems like a good counterpoint to...

CE: Thank you for coming on.

Sarah: I don't have good internet so it might not work out.

CE: I can hear you.

Sarah: Awesome.

CE: So yeah, do you want to re-frame the question maybe?

Sarah: Yeah, so briefly, as an educator working with communities that are less, I guess we could say cushiony; I don't know, I feel like any of the terms I use are going to be silly because we're working towards moving past them anyway, but just in terms of the stereotypes, let's say going to communities where they're just dealing with different struggles than I am, how can I begin to express some of these sentiments to them without sounding ridiculous, basically?

CE: Yeah. So maybe I'll first say that gift economy is not, it would be a very very narrow or shallow vision of gift economy if it's just something that you add on after you've gotten your economic needs taken care of, and so now I can afford to do

some gifting. It is really an orientation, a perceptual orientation to how we see the world and how we see ourselves. So in our interactions with other people we may not ever talk explicitly about gift economy or gift culture, or living in the gift. But when we are standing in that place and seeing with eyes of gift, one of the later sessions is called 'eyes of generosity' or 'seeing with generous eyes,' and when we see other people as, 'I know who you are, I know why you're here, you are here to give something to the world,' then we become a walking invitation for that to happen and what we say to them is speaking to that part of them, even if we're not laying on an ideology. So the skillful means to do that, it's unique to every individual and every relationship. It might be to name a gift in that young man or young woman that you see that they do not see, or that no one else has seen, to invoke that or to speak that into existence. It may be to signal generosity, signal that the Universe is generous in some way; to be a conduit to the generosity of the Universe that introduces a data point into their lives that didn't fit the story of scarcity. I remember a story that someone shared at a retreat. She was in high school and I think she was being raised by her father and then her father died and she kinda fell through the cracks. She was still in high school and no one was taking care of her, she was running out of money and cutting back on food and she didn't know what to do. And then she was sitting in class one day and she got called to the principal's office. So she goes to the principal's office and the secretary said, "Somebody came and gave you this envelope." And she opened it up and there was a 100 dollar bill in it. It was completely unexpected, no one took credit for it, it just came to her at just the right moment to change her whole attitude about life. That was, it was a signal that you're not alone here. The amount of money actually maybe wasn't that much but because she received that she was able to ask for help and she got taken care of, because she got a signal that the Universe is generous. So sometimes we have these moments where we are feeling that call to be an agent of the generosity of the Universe, and that call takes the form of this impulse to give something to somebody, to say something to somebody, the right thing at the right time. So yeah, there's no formula for that, but this does not depend on being in financially wealthy circumstances.

Thank you, your internet isn't that good so I didn't hear what you just said but I see your smile. Thank you, Sarah.

Alright, let's see here. Here's one. Maybe I won't go too into this now, this might fit into a later session, the idea that: if you do things by gift what about the other people who are charging for it? Like if you have a farmstand or something and you're giving away free vegetables, what about all those poor farmers who are barely making it charging and now you're undercutting them by offering it for free? And I think that that is, it's a good question. It comes down to, what are you serving with your gifts? Sometimes, I've noticed in myself, especially when I was first stepping into this, one thing I was serving was a self-image of not being a 'shamelessly commercial person.' I'm in gift, I'm not charging for it, so I can't be blamed for being a money-grubber, part of the money game. So if what you serve is exculpation from the money game, alleviating your guilt and shame at being

involved in the dirty world of money, if that's what you're serving than that's a different thing than serving the well-being of a community, or other farmers or massage therapists, or something like that. So, a lot of these questions come from a lack of clarity about what it is that you serve. This will be coming up again later in the course in several instances. Yeah, so maybe that person with a farmstand, when they understand that they are serving a whole community they might start charging again, or they might think, 'okay, there are people who can't afford it, so maybe in some other way I will give my vegetables to them.' My brother does this, he gives vegetables to food banks, he has all this organic produce and sometimes he can't sell it so he does it that way, and he's not getting as much public recognition for being oh-so altruistic, but he is serving the goal of feeding hungry people. The general answer is clarity on what we serve.

Adam, why don't you come on? Let's bring Adam Shapiro on. Love to see your smiling face.

Meanwhile I'm scrolling down through some other ones, there was one more that I really wanted to get to.

Adam: Hi, Charles. Hi, everybody.

CE: Good to see you.

Adam: Good to see you, too. Thanks for having me.

CE: Yeah. So what did you want to say?

Adam: That I love you, thanks so much for doing this, this is amazing. Actually I was really moved, I'm more moved by your last comment about what we're serving with our gifts, than with my question. So if you want to go down that route?

CE: Whatever's alive for you.

Adam: Years ago I decided that it's really hard for me to value my services and it feels unfair to set a fixed price on those, so I moved into a pay-as-you-will model. And I've been hopeful that that serves the community, and in some ways I've found that it does. As well as serves my need to not have a fixed value on my services. However, I can also feel the nature of not wanting to be money-hungry and so, backing up into my question, I'm looking for what actions can we take to break this ?? And, I felt like pay-as-you-will was an effective means and it created some interesting conversations about intrinsic value and meeting people where they are, but I question is it actually in the gift? Or is a pay-as-you-go still expecting some return? I don't know if that's alive for you and you want to respond to that?

CE: I have some expectation that at least some people are going to pay some tuition for this course. If I didn't have that expectation I probably wouldn't have asked this

whole team of people to work with me. I have an expectation but the question is, am I serving that or am I serving the information that is coming through and motivated this course to begin with? Which am I serving in the end? So, in any gift culture you have an expectation that there's gonna be some kind of return, you just don't exercise control over the return and what that return will be. In some indigenous culture there's one where there's a culture of making arrows, you make arrows and you give them to special people; you know, to my brother-in-law, I'm giving you an arrow because you married my sister. And then the custom is that when he kills an animal with that arrow he's going to give you the nicest piece of meat. And if he doesn't do that and over time he doesn't reciprocate in that way to people who give him arrows he's going to become very unpopular and ostracized, no one's gonna wanna take care of him. But you're not actually, you can't actually force him. You can't sue him or coerce him into giving the best piece. And what actually is the best piece of meat? If he really likes you then he might give you even better than would be expected culturally. If you guys are not getting along he might give you a little worse, is that really the best piece? Come on, man. So you're not controlling the return, that's what makes something a gift. There's a release, there's a letting go. So that's why pay-what-you-will does participate in gift; it could be more or less depending on how much psychological pressure you're issuing on that person to give you a certain amount. I try not to issue any psychological pressure. And one more thing I want to add, you didn't ask this but, a lot of people -- this actually fits into a later session but I'm just gonna say this now because it's up for me -- a lot of people, you included I think... I'm not sure how much I should reveal, I know you a bit. A lot of people will say, I do it pay-what-you-will, pay-what-feels-right, but it's just not working. Because I'm not making as much as I would if I charged a set amount, for this course or whatever. And it's not sustainable and the only reason it's working is because I'm wearing down the inheritance from my grandpa or because my wife has a really lucrative job and she's supporting it, or something like that. So there's this idea that it only counts as 'working' if it is a viable business model in and of itself. But there is a larger form of generosity that's saying, actually what if the Universe, via your grandfather's inheritance, or via your wife's income or whatever it is, or your other job that you used to have and you saved a lot of money, what if that is the... you have to count that, too. What if you're being supported even if that particular financial model in isolation isn't 'working.' Your life as a whole is working. And the return gift is coming back in some way. So I want to put that out there, too. Because I've certainly experienced that. Years ago, around seven years ago, someone gave me \$10,000. And it came at a time when I had, it wasn't when I was like totally rock bottom, but it came at a time; it was maybe 2009, 2010. I was barely scraping by and I had \$1,000 in my bank account and someone just gave me \$10,000. That year worked because of that. I could have had a story that said 'this isn't working' except... if it weren't for that 10,000 it wouldn't have worked so this isn't working. Or I could have a story of, 'wow, this is working in a miraculous way because if not from one avenue there's another one that is making this possible. And it's not a magic formula that, 'if I only step more deeply into gift than the Universe will support me.' The generosity of the Universe is much deeper than that. The way that the Universe supports you might be to put you through an ordeal of financial

poverty that brings what was hidden into light or develops capacities in you that you didn't know you had or weren't activated before. So the trust in the circle of the gift, that the gift comes back, extends to the gifts that we do not see as gifts when they come. And requires knowing that the circle can go beyond the horizon of even our own biographical lifetimes. That faith is so much easier to hold if you are in a gift culture. It's not something that we can exhort ourselves or each other to believe in, but it is a piece of truth that can be communicated to us, that we can communicate to others, and that the random occurrences of grace and generosity we implant within ourselves like 'wow, I cannot explain that. Some other intelligence is operating here. And it seems like a capricious intelligence. Like, I didn't deserve that \$10,000 anymore than the poor Black single mom three blocks away whose kids are going hungry. Do I imagine that I deserve it more? That I'm giving more to the world than she is? Working two jobs maybe to put a little food on the table. It is inexplicable. To recognize that and to embrace the mystery of it is an antidote to the kind of privileged entitlement that can come, like 'oh, I'm receiving these gifts, I must deserve it,' because it puts us into a state of humbleness. Into a state of gratitude. I didn't deserve it and I received it. What does that mean? It means that it's not mine, in a way. I didn't deserve it, it just came to me. Therefore, and here's a basic principle of gift: therefore, I want to give it forward. Because I don't deserve to keep it in a way. It's not that I'm bad and I don't deserve to keep it, it's just that it was a gift. So I see it as a gift, I treat it as a gift, and I want to give it forward. I guess that's relating back to that non-accumulation conversation as well. So, may we become agents of gratitude, both receiving it and passing it through.

Thanks, Adam. So I think I'm gonna maybe wrap it up now. We've had so many, well at least for me, a lot of good interactions. I'm very glad we're doing this call. It's been a bit over an hour now, so let's maybe say one thing about Christmas. The Holidays. Whatever people celebrate here. Solstice. Chanukah. Traditionally a time of giving that has been, it seems, perverted into something contrary to its original spirit. There's a book I looked at a wild back called The Sacred Santa which looks at the whole Christmas festival as it is today as this ritual of consumption that drew, maybe to some extent still draws its legitimacy from the elevation of consumption to a almost moral-imperative. 'The good life,' associated with bigger and bigger piles of stuff. More and more abundance. More and more toys. That was the ideal, that was paradise. More. More things was paradise. And in my family at least, the ritual of the Christmas trees with the pile of presents underneath it, that altar, seems obsolete. Even my mom no longer resonates with that, it feels, it's not aligned with the emerging purpose of our civilization. The gift of our civilization that we want to step into is one of restoration. Of healing; socially, environmentally. So we need rituals that affirm that collective purpose. So anything that is aligned with the old story of 'ascent,' of making more and more of nature into ours, that is falling away. We are not wanting to serve that through our rituals. This is an open question. What rituals of gift can partake in the new collective gift of restoration, regeneration, social and ecological healing? I don't have an answer for that, but I know that it's a good question to ask. So maybe as you all, we're gonna put the course on pause, maybe have one little thing right before the holidays, we're still working on that. But

basically putting the course on pause until January so we can all have some downtime. And I'll say that, here we are, in the vibration of this course, in this conversation, and then going back to Christmas or whatever holiday it might be for you which is like an outpost of the old world. And the family gatherings with all the old stories and who we were in the old stories is being called back. That's for many of us the situation, stepping back into the old, and does it pull us back into it? Or can we maybe pull it a little bit more toward the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible? And in preparation... yeah, just feeling my awareness right now of, and maybe we can all just do that, to feel a new spirit. Or an old spirit. A very old spirit. A primal memory; the turning of the seasons; the days becoming longer again; the sun waking up. The dot of yang at the maximum of yin. And us as carriers of the spirit of gift. I was going to construct a meditation around this but really I would just like to invite us to be in the dilemma and difficulty of that, of this transition point. Of having a foot in both worlds. And maybe visualize yourself as a bridge between these worlds. And the internal bridge, both worlds being within yourself. Maybe close your eyes for that. Internally, a chasm between these two worlds and there you are, with one foot on each, bridging the chasm. An invitation. As beautiful a bridge as you can be. Welcoming. If you are going to be with family, take a moment to clarify what you want to serve in those reunions. It might seem forbidding and impossible, that's okay. You don't have to know how. Giving attention to the willingness, and then letting it go, confident that the how may come as a gift. Feeling serene in that.

Thank you everybody for joining me in this time. The recording will be up for you all to listen to. I'm really grateful that so many people have come onto this course, so thank you, thank you, thank you, and I will be seeing more of you.