

**Session 7.2: Sacrifice**  
**Living in the Gift**  
**[charleseisenstein.org/gift](http://charleseisenstein.org/gift)**

**Charles Eisenstein:**

Today I want to work with the story that Cynthia Jurs told about the Earth Treasure Vase ceremony in Liberia. If you recall that scene, there was a gathering of people from all around, people who were so poor that they didn't even know where tomorrow's food was coming from – but they wanted peace so fervently that some of them put their very last coins into the Vase. That's how much they wanted peace.

So when I heard that story, what it brought up for me was the question – What do I care about that much? What do I care about so much that I would be willing to sacrifice anything in order to make it happen? And, what is the precious coin in my pocket? Not being financially destitute, what is that precious coin that I would be willing to put into the Earth Treasure Vase? What would I be willing to let go of?

I can imagine situations in life – like if my child were lost in a crowd or something like that – where I would put everything aside in single-minded pursuit of that goal. Usually what we are here to serve is not so imminent and urgent as that, yet it still exerts a kind of urgency that up-wells inside of ourselves. So what the question brings up in me is – “What am I here to serve?”

So, it is said that one cannot serve two masters. I would modify that to say that one cannot serve two masters **forever**. You can serve two masters for a while but at some point a conflict arises. So, to take a personal example - when I was writing the Ascent of Humanity, I entertained fantasies of wealth and fame because the book was so brilliant, I thought I was sure to swiftly become a renowned thought leader. So I wrote and I wrote and I thought – Yeah, this is really going to put me on the map. It's going to bring me out of obscurity. At the time I was really languishing; 30 some years old; unemployed, etc. etc. feeling like I had wasted my life. Everyone who I had graduated with had prestigious jobs in big institutions and here I am nursing some critique of civilization, justifying my own failures with that critique, and like – hey, this is going to show everybody. So I had those kinds of motives.

So there I was writing the book and it wasn't clear to me – maybe I didn't even think about it – what was I serving with this book? Was I serving this ambitious goal of being a renowned thought leader, or was I serving the goal that I was telling myself that I was serving, to bring this earth-changing idea into full articulation – this idea of a transition from separation?

I would say I was serving both ambitions until a clarifying moment arose that asked me – “Well which do you serve?” Because every publisher, every literary agent rejected the manuscript and it soon became obvious that this book was not going to become my key to wealth and fame.

Around this time I had a vision in which an angel swooped in and made me an offer. It was a boy angel and he said – “I will grant your wish that these ideas you are exploring will fulfill their world-changing purpose, however, the deal is that you will receive no recognition for them whatsoever. Maybe they will be stolen by somebody else, or maybe someone will read your book and popularize

the idea and get all the renown, while you die poor and unknown. What you say you want - that will happen on earth. Humanity will shift into the Age of Reunion, but you won't get credit for it. Deal?"

"Okay", I said. In that moment I agreed to the deal because it was the moment where I was confronted with – Okay, what do I really want? What do I really serve?

Paradoxically through that letting go I did achieve some measure of recognition as a thought leader, but it only happened through the letting go of that. Because then I became free to serve the work, rather than serving myself. And I don't want to make this an "All or Nothing" thing, because I'm not claiming here to be in perfect service to the work. I am describing a landmark on a long journey, part of a life-long process of release, and greater and greater alignment with a purpose.

So that choice and that vision took place in a special moment, kind of outside of linear time. That conversation then projects itself onto the linear timeline in a diffraction pattern comprising a series of real-life choices. So that agreement in that moment then takes form, piecemeal, through a series of choices that I make to align with the fulfillment of the purpose of the work.

The dialogue with the angel just keeps on coming back to me as a touchstone every time I face these choices, and it reminds me to take a step back and ask – What do I serve? And I could ask you – What are you here to serve? Is it Peace? Is it Healing? Is it your family? Is it your place – a river, a forest, a community? Is it Gaia?

So let's say that it's Peace, and maybe at the same time you are serving the image of yourself as being an ethical person. Or maybe you are serving "escaping guilt for being among the perpetrator class". Maybe you want to serve that at the same time as you genuinely want to serve Peace.

Well you could then be confronted with a situation where in the service of Peace, you have to do something that everyone will condemn you for and you can no longer uphold that image of being an ethical person.

In my case I've sometimes had to ask myself – should I serve "looking intelligent" or shall I serve "fostering understanding"? Because these two goals – sometimes they are not opposed, like I can look smart by giving a lucid explanation of something – but sometimes they are opposed. It might be better not to blurt out the answer, thereby showing how smart I am. It might be better to let someone else work it out for themselves; stay sitting in the background, and then they are the smart ones. If that is what actually serves the spreading of understanding in the world, then that's what I want to do. That's what I want to have the presence of mind to choose.

So to serve understanding, I might have to render a sacrifice of that precious coin that was put in my pocket as a schoolboy, praised for being smart; loved and accepted for being smart. That's some deep programming. That's a very precious coin. And the thought of letting go of that coin is a little scary. Will I be safe without carrying that coin, without managing people's perceptions of me as a smart person?

That's the kind of example I'm talking about – the kind of coin, that if we want to upgrade our effectiveness in the world; to upgrade the level of service we render to what we really care about – that's the kind of ego possession that we might be called to sacrifice – that we might be called to place in the Earth Treasure Vase.

I give you some examples of the kind of coins you might offer to the Earth Treasure Vase: Seeking approval; Keeping everyone happy. Identifying as having been right all along; Being special; financial security; A grudge – maybe you have to let go of a grudge and put that in the vase. It could be a possession, a self-object. Maybe it's a crystal or some painting or something that has gotten wrapped up in your identity, and the moment comes to give it away. It could be self-importance; A judgment you've been holding; Being seen as good: It could be a secret. It could be a habit of asserting dominance. or deflecting intimacy; Being in control; Not risking embarrassment.; Avoiding conflict – am I really being thoughtful or am I just attempting to avoid a conflict? Am I really being kind, or nice – does that really serve? Sometimes showing off herbal knowledge – or showing off your indigenous ties – that could be a coin that you're ready to let go of if it does not serve...any kind of showing off. Here's another kind – Name-dropping. That's another way of special-ness.

It could be getting laid. For a long time I seemed to have this secret agenda. No matter where I was going or what I was doing, I was in service to the affirmation of my worth that came through the sexual attention of women. So was I really serving the topic of my speech, or retreat, or whatever it was? Even if I wouldn't act on it – was I serving this other agenda that was hidden to me?

It could be an image of success that would please your father – or gaining father's approval. It could be avoiding the shame of being identified as privileged - maybe that's what you serve. Or being seen, heard, recognised and approved of - or just seeking attention.

Maybe you're in a meeting with activists and there are some opinions about what should be done, and you have this urge to speak up and say your opinion. Is that really because it's going to serve the whole, or is it because – Yeah I want attention too? And maybe it doesn't serve. Maybe it just creates discord or distraction, or extends the meeting longer than it needs to be. Why are you saying that? What are you serving? So that might be something that you're ready to sacrifice to the Vase.

You could be the opposite too - avoiding attention. Maybe you serve that when sometimes intervention is necessary, that does draw attention to yourself. So it could be any of these things. They're all familiar to me. It could be something else entirely. I could go on and on, but I'd like to ask you to find one of these precious coins that you feel ready to let go of, and before we go there in a little meditation, I'd like to ask - "Why? Why should you let go of any of these? From a really selfish perspective, why should you?"

That was a trick question, and in fact it was not the right question, because when we frame it in terms of "should", shame-avoidance tinges the answer. What does "should" actually mean here?

As I've said before, this course is not about becoming a better person. So instead of saying – why "should" you let go of any of these coins, as if you'll be good; you'll be worthy; you'll be virtuous if you do – instead, let me tell you what happens as these coins are surrendered to the soil.

I'll say three things. The first is a liberation of creative energy, because you will be freeing part of yourself from bondage and bringing it home. These coins, and the maintenance of these coins, these are repositories of a lot of life force, that gets liberated when we give them up.

The second fruit is effectiveness in the world. As long as you serve two masters, you are in conflict. The life energy you put into your actions is diverted towards a secret agenda. For example if it is

secretly more important to you to gain the approval of other activists than it is to stop a pipeline, then getting arrested in a failed direct action might be more satisfactory than actually stopping the pipeline, especially if you or your organisation gets no credit for stopping the pipeline. If what you really wanted was the recognition, or the credit, then you'd rather have it built but get credit for trying, than have it not built and get no credit for it. And this came up - I was talking to a Native American about a pipeline that he stopped in British Colombia that had none of the hullabaloo surrounding it that the access pipe had - that was stopped completely by local indigenous people using their own less-confrontational methods, including ceremonial methods, and no-one even really knew about it. And they don't get the credit, and they don't want the credit and they don't need the credit. What they want is for the water to be protected.

This is an example of a kind of clarifying moment that we might face as we say to ourselves and others - "Here is what I want." Then we get a question back from the Universe - "Is this really what you want?" And if there is a conflict; if we have been serving two things, we might be offered the opportunity to give up one of those things.

You can think of many circumstances where people are serving many masters at the same time. For example if you have motive for being seen and heard - or if a lot of people have that motive - what happens to the conversation? What happens to the circle, or the meeting, when lots of people are serving that motive, rather than the stated purpose of the meeting?

Or what happens in a political situation, where everyone's first loyalty is to being shown as right; everyone being right; everyone holding on to being right - is any compromise possible? Is any understanding possible?

So you can see the pervasiveness and the depth of the dysfunction that results from serving two masters.

The second fruit of the sacrifice is expanded effectiveness in the world, because no longer will you unconsciously split your intention. New Age techniques of setting an intention are ineffective if unconscious intentions are stronger than the ones you voice. Inner conflicts can absorb 99% of your energy - absorbing it by pushing against yourself, leaving 1% to actually create anything. It is unconscious behaviour that is powerful, and this is true, no matter what your goal is - even if it is totally selfish. Just look at people who are unapologetically ambitious without pretending to themselves that they want anything but money and power. Those are the ones that are free to cynically, ruthlessly manipulate and lie to people - to deceive people - to do whatever it takes. They won't be that effective if they are simultaneously trying to show themselves that they are ethical. If they are trying to maintain an internal image of - "Yes, I'm a good person" - that can get in the way of the naked quest for power.

The third fruit of the sacrifice is what we talked about before - synchronicity. Release of control over "how", plus "a sacrifice of serving another master" - these two things together line up events toward what you serve, and all of these sacrifices, all of these coins that I talk about putting in the Vase - these are, in various ways, a release of control. And so, in and of themselves, they will attract a higher level of noticeable synchronicity in your life.

So, let's work with this a little bit. Orient to one of those other masters, maybe one of those coins that I listed for you, or maybe something that I didn't mention. Close your eyes for this, and note

among all of these masters that you might serve – that one of them feels kind of relevant right now. It feels kind of alive for you, like – Yeah, this is the one that I'm ready for.

The coins that we carry in our metaphorical pockets seem so precious. I'd never give that up! Until one day they aren't precious – they're a drag. I want you to identify one of those – a self-serving goal that now feels like a burden. If it doesn't feel like a burden; if you aren't done with it, then the good news is you get to keep it. We're really trusting a readiness here, and this is about more than some psychological technique, it's also a practice of trusting the readiness to give, knowing that we naturally want to give, and that this readiness will ripen within us till eventually we want to give everything – to make a gift of our entire lives, and trust this ripening process.

So find something that you are sick and tired of serving – your vanity maybe; your self-image; looking smart; being right; avoiding conflict; seeking approval. Whatever it is, notice the feeling – that you're done with that – done with it and, maybe, also feeling helpless to change. That's okay, change will come. Pause the recording if you need to, to find that thing that you are ready to sacrifice to the earth.

Okay, so now you have the other master than you are done with – this coin in your hand now that you are ready to give up. And so you look at this coin and what once seemed indispensable now seems like a foreign object. And in your mind's eye, as you look at this coin, make the association of what it represents – of what it means. And as you hold it, feel also the presence of what you are actually here to serve. Feel the presence of that which you pray for – the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible – however that appears for you. This is the being to which we offer our coin.

It might be a global thing. It might be on a smaller level. What are you in service to right now? Why are you here right now? And maybe you can't even name it. That's okay, but you can feel it. And imagine all of us, all of us on this course, in common service to a world, embodying the gift – each of us rendering our own particular flavor of service to a world embodying the gift.

And there's your coin, and now the Vase is being passed around. And one by one, picture all of the people listening to this material, putting their coin - of vanity; of control; of looking good; of seeking approval; of being right – putting their coin in the Vase. And it comes to you and you take that coin and place it in the Vase as well, and you watch now as the Vase is buried in the earth.

And it's gone now, and notice how light you feel without it. And just spend a minute feeling this lightness. Maybe you feel a little unfamiliar to yourself without this familiar weight in your spiritual pocket. Who are you now? Make this your seed question:

Who am I without...(whatever it is). Who am I without my approval seeking? Who am I without my conflict avoidance? Who am I without my withholding? Without my demonstrating my virtue? Who am I?

Make that a question and, ideally, ask it to yourself first thing in the morning, and whenever it occurs to you and, as you ask it, recall again this feeling of lightness.

Okay. Goodbye for now, and thank you.

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