

## **Sacred Economics (2019 remix)**

Transcript of film by Ian MacKenzie, featuring Charles Eisenstein

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/sacred-economics-2019-remix/>

“We’ve all been given a gift. The gift of life. What we do with our lives is our gift back.”

- Edo

Anytime you want to understand something - why is such and such happening, why is there a biodiversity crisis, or why are we drilling for more oil when it’s polluting the atmosphere and causing oil spills, why? And when you ask “why?”, down a couple levels of “why?” you always get to money.

Yeah, I talk a lot about the story of self that every culture has, and it answers the question, “What are you? What is it to be human?” So it says that you’re this separate being among other separate beings in a universe that is separate from yourself as well. Like, you’re not me, that plant is not me, that’s something separate. And this story of self really creates our world. If you’re a separate self, and there are other separate selves out there and other species out there and the universe is fundamentally indifferent to you, or even hostile, then you definitely want to have control. You want to have power over other beings and over these whimsical, arbitrary forces of nature that could extinguish you at any time.

This story is becoming obsolete. It’s becoming no longer true. We don’t resonate with it anymore, and it’s actually generating crises that are insolvable from the methods of control. And that’s what’s clearing the space for us to step into a new story of self and a new story of the people.

## **Sacred Economics**

Money is an agreement. It doesn’t have value all by itself. It has value because people agree that it has value. Economists will tell you what money does. It facilitates exchange, you use it to count things, keep track of things. You write some numbers on a magical piece of paper called a check, and you can cause all kinds of abundant goods to come to your house! You could even cause misery for thousands of people, if you are one of the highest initiates of the magic of money.

Scarcity is built into the money system. On the most obvious level, it’s because of the way money is created, as interest-bearing debt. So anytime a bank lends money into existence, or the federal reserve creates money, the money comes along with a corresponding amount of debt. And the debt, because there’s interest on it, is always greater than the amount of money. So it essentially throws people into competition with each other for never enough money.

Growth is another thing that’s built into our money system. If you’re a bank, you’re going to lend to the person who’s going to create new goods and services so they can profit and they can pay

you back. You're not going to lend to somebody who doesn't create goods and services. So money goes toward those who will create even more of it. But basically economic growth means that you have to find something that was once nature and make it into a good, or was once a gift relationship and make it into a service. You have to find something that people once got for free, or did for themselves, or for each other, and then take it away and sell it back to them somehow.

By turning things into commodities, we get cut off from nature in the same ways we're cut off from community. We look at nature with eyes of, it's just a bunch of stuff. And that leaves us very lonely, and leaves us with many basic human needs that go unmet. And if you have money, you might try to fill this hunger through purchasing, through buying things, or accumulating money itself. And of course now we're nearing the end of growth. The planet can't sustain much more growth. And that's why the crisis that we have today won't go away.

### **The Gift**

One of the things I talk about is the sense of wrongness that I had as a child. I think most kids have some sense of it, that it's not supposed to be this way. You know, for example, that you're not supposed to hate Monday and be happy when you don't have to go to school. School should be something that you love, life should be something that you love.

We didn't earn any of the things that really keep us alive or that make life good. We didn't earn air. We didn't earn being born. We didn't earn our conception. We didn't earn being able to breathe. We didn't earn having a planet that can provide food. We didn't earn the sun.

So I think that on some level people have this inborn gratitude, because on some level we know that we didn't earn any of this. We know that life is a gift. Well, if you know that you've received a gift, then the natural response is gratitude, the desire to give in turn.

In a gift economy it's not true, the way it is in our money economy, that everybody's in competition with everybody else. In a gift society if you have more than you need, you give it to somebody who needs it. That's how you get status, and that's even where security comes from, because if you build up all that gratitude then people are going to take care of you too. And if there are no gifts, then there's no community. And we can see, as societies become more monetized, that community is disappearing. People long for it, but you can't just have community as an add-on to a monetized life. You have to actually need each other.

People desire to enact their gifts, and if they were free from money they would do it. But money is so often a barrier. People think, "Oh, I'd love to do this. But can I afford to do it? Is it practical?" Money stops them.

What beautiful thing would I do? What am I called to do? Would it be to set up big gardens for homeless people to take care of, and reconnect them to nature? Would it be to clean up a toxic waste site? What would you do? What beautiful thing would you do? And why isn't it practical to do these things? Why isn't there money in those things?

## **The Shift**

An economy that embodies the principles of the gift is an economy that is simply grounded in the truth. The task before us is to align money with the true expression of our gifts. It requires a very different mechanism for the creation of money and the circulation of money. They include things like negative interest, which reverses the effects of usury. They include things like the internalization of costs, so that you can no longer pollute and have somebody else or future generations pay the costs. They include a social dividend, sharing in the wealth that comes from what should be the commons: the land, the aquifers, our cultural heritage. They include a relocation of a lot of economic functions. They include all kinds of peer-to-peer financing and the peer-to-peer revolution.

What will it take to shift away from the current money system? Well, the current money system just works less and less well. Growth can only be maintained at a higher and higher cost. Even our best efforts can't keep the economy growing as fast as it needs to for the system to work, and that creates further misery. People just can't take it anymore. Even the people on top, even the winners of this artificially induced competition – they're not happy either. It's not working for them either.

So I think that we're going to see a series of crisis moments, each one more severe than the last. And at each crisis moment we'll have a collective choice. Do we give up the game and join the people, or do we hold on even tighter? It's really up to us to determine at what point this wake-up point will happen.

## **The Initiation**

Was this all a big mistake? That's a good question, and it sure seems like it was sometimes. When you look around at the horrors that have taken place on this earth, and that are ongoing right now, and some people think, "I just don't want any part of this. Civilization was a huge mistake." I came to see this whole journey of separation not as a mistake, but as part of a larger process. It started, I think, with the environmental movement in the 1960's. That was its first awakening into mass consciousness. And the astronauts went up and experienced the pinnacle of separation. And the photos that got beamed down – even today, it still evokes love in us.

So we're falling in love with Earth. That's one part of our transition into adulthood. The other part is the coming of age ordeal, when the old world falls apart and a new world is born.

You know, a child plays. A child plays and develops his or her gifts, but doesn't apply them toward their true purpose yet. And that's what humanity's been doing: playing with our gifts of technology and culture, and developing these gifts.

Now we're coming into adulthood and it's time to apply them to their true purpose. At the beginning I think that will be to simply heal the damage that's been done. There's a lot of healing that needs to be done, and it's almost impossible, actually. You could say that we're in

the business of creating a miracle here on earth. I'm saying it's something that's impossible from an old understanding of reality, but possible from a new one. And in fact it's necessary. And in fact anything less than that isn't even worth trying.