



# Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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## Generosity

## Wisdom Story



*Tzedakah* is similar to one of the five pillars of Islam, which is *zakat*. It refers to charity, but also means both “purification” and “growth.” In Buddhism, the practice of giving and the virtue of generosity are called *dana*. It is one of the “ten perfections.” At its essence, *dana* is considered to be revolutionary, as are *tzedakah* and *zakat*, because it is giving freely without any expectation of receiving something in return.

### Introduction to the Theme

In seeking to replace the principles and sources, the UUA’s Article II Study Commission has included generosity among their seven proposed values. Of these values, generosity is the one that is not reflected in the existing principles and sources explicitly or implicitly. And yet it is a fundamental value in various religious traditions.

In his letter to the *Galatians*, Paul listed generosity as one of the fruits of the spirit. In Judaism, the Hebrew word, *tzedakah*, is equated with charity. It refers to an act of kindness that combines generosity with justice. Notably, such giving is understood to spiritually benefit the giver more than the recipient.

The Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root of the word generous, *genh<sub>1</sub>-*, means “to beget,” “to give birth to,” or “to produce.” In Latin, this gave rise to the word *genus*, meaning “birth,” “race,” or “kind.” From *genus*, the adjective *generōsus* was formed, meaning “of noble birth” or “magnanimous.” We get from this *noblesse oblige*. Emerson wrote, “Noblesse oblige; or, superior advantages bind you to larger generosity.” This expectation was expressed in Luke 12:48, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded;

*(Continued on page 6)*

### When You Have More Than Enough

*Dawn Star Sarahs-Borchelt*

Once upon a time there was a family. Maybe this family had not quite enough to eat. Or maybe they had just about enough. Or ... perhaps they had MORE than enough.

You might not have been able to tell. THEY might not have been able to tell. Sometimes it’s hard to tell if you have enough or not. It’s hard not to want more or different things than you have.

In any case, this family came together one ...day for a celebration. A feast. A time of gratitude.

They gathered, as we have done, around a table. There was food. There was drink. There were flowers to remind them of beauty.

And then there was a call from the gate outside their door.

“Hello! We’re hungry and thirsty and we see your ...feast. May we come in?”

Well, the family didn’t know at first how to answer. Who were these people at the gate? Was it safe to let these people in? Did they have enough to share? Was there room?

But they remembered. They remembered that most of them had come to this family, to this celebration, from someplace else.

They remembered that even they, who were there at that table, had not always been kind to each other. There had been times when they hurt each other. There were still times when they made each other sad or angry or afraid. There is no way to make life completely safe.

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Generosity & Reimagining the Common Good

Reimagining the Common Good is impossible without evoking the power of generosity. We are implored to be a Good Samaritan, for at one time or another we will surely be the person who is attacked and lying along the side of the road. Generosity, in the words of M. Scott Peck, transforms our hard eyes of judgment into the soft eyes of respect. Generosity is a redemptive act, a saving grace because we do not have to be generous, but when we are so much good is created. What compels generosity? Compassion? Duty? Lovingkindness? Gratitude? Faith? Empathy? Humility? Love? Generosity is the mustard seed of which Jesus spoke. This least of all seeds becomes one of the greatest herbs.

### *A Theme-Based Ministry Project*

*This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.*

## Reimagining the Common Good

## A Longer Table

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

They remembered times when others had shared with them, even when the others might not have had quite enough of their own.

They remembered when each new member of the family had been born, or come to stay, or married in. They remembered that they had always found a way to make room.

And they remembered an old, old saying: when you have more than you need, it is better to build a longer table than to build a higher fence.



We have enough, they said. We might have more than enough. We are many, and strong, and we can hold a safe space here in our home for all who come.

And so they went out of their door and to the gate in the fence. They opened the gate. They invited the people ...in. Inside, they pulled out another table and made the space for these newcomers. They covered it with a cloth. And the newcomers set upon it a dish full of something fragrant and delicious which was strange and wonderful to the family. Everybody shared. And there was enough.

I want us to notice that we only heard one part of that story. We heard the story of the people who were in the family in the house, ready to feast. We didn't hear the story of the people at the gate, wanting to come in. We don't know who they are or why they are there or what they bring to the table other than the strange and wonderful food! So when you hear other stories..., I want you to think about whose stories they are. And whose stories they aren't. And what those other stories might have been.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/when-you-have-more-enough>

## Time to Give

### Be Generous with Your Time

Joseph Telushkin



Be generous with time, particularly when the consequences to the other person are significant. I remember reading a comment of Simone Weil (a philosopher and member of the French resistance) that during the Nazi occupation of France, she knew many people who would willingly have stood in line for hours to procure rationed eggs, but who would not have done so to save the life of someone unrelated to them. Yitta Halberstam Mandelbaum relates an incident about the late rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, the great Jewish spiritual teacher, songwriter, and performer.... The rabbi's flight was fully booked and about to be boarded when an airline representative made an announcement: "There are two people who have medical emergencies and desperately need to get back to New York. We're asking for two volunteers to give up their seats for the sake of these people. The next flight to New York is in three hours. We know it's a great sacrifice and we're sorry to put you in this position. Is there anybody here willing to extend themselves to help these people?" One hand in the crowd immediately shot up. "I'm ready," shouted Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. A man known to be extraordinarily busy, Carlebach was constantly traveling from concert to concert, and then meeting with and counseling people late into the night. The woman who was present ...told Yitta: "Of all of us gathered there that morning, it was Shlomo who probably had the most compelling need to get back fast. He had the least time to spare. But miraculously, he also had the most time to give."

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/20692>

## No Separation

### Bowls of Community

Brenda Shoshanna

A beautiful, ancient part of Zen practice is *takahatsu*. This is the time when monks put on straw sandals, wear straw hats with large brims, form a line and go on foot, one behind the other, down into the villages with their begging bowls. The villagers can hear the monks coming from a distance as they chant "Ho, ho, ho" over and over again.

When the villagers hear the chanting, they know the monks are coming to receive offerings. The monks never ask directly. They simply stand with their begging bowls chanting. When a villager comes to make an offering, the monk and villager bow to one another at the same time. Due to the large straw hat the monk is wearing, he cannot see who is making the offering, nor can the person see the face of the monk. The giving and receiving are done anonymously. The giver does not become inflated, thinking how wonderful it is that he gives. The



one who receives is not shamed, feeling he is needy. The monk is giving the villager the gift of having an opportunity to share. The villager is providing sustenance for the monk who chants, meditates, and cares for him. There is no separation; in this moment, the giver and receiver become one.

...As I watched the monks wind their way down the hill, I knew that I'd received a gift that went beyond anything I was deserving of.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/27791>

# Readings from the Common Bowl



**Day 1:** “The practice of generosity is about creating space. We see our limits and we extend them continuously, which creates an expansiveness and spaciousness of mind that’s deeply composed.” Sharon Salzberg

**Day 2:** “To be generous means... to redefine our boundaries. For the generous person, borders are permeable. What is yours—your suffering, your problems—is also mine: This is compassion. What is mine—my possessions, my body, my knowledge and abilities, my time and resources, my energy—is also yours: This is generosity.” Pierro Ferucci

**Day 3:** “I think the biggest block to finding generosity of spirit in one’s own life is never to have had it modeled for you, so you don’t even know what it looks like and you’ve never known anybody whose own life is animated by that movement of the heart.” Parker Palmer

**Day 4:** “When people become more gracious at receiving, it opens up their generosity in new ways. You cannot be a truly generous giver without also being a generous receiver.” Mark Ewert

**Day 5:** “I think that generosity has many levels. We have to think generously, speak generously, and act generously. ...Generosity cannot come from guilt or pity. It has to come from hearts that are fearless and free and are willing to share abundantly all that is given to us.” Henri Nouwen

**Day 6:** “Every minute of every hour of every day you are making the world, just as you are making yourself, and you might as well do it with generosity and kindness and style.” Rebecca Solnit

**Day 7:** “True generosity is an offering; given freely and out of pure love. No strings attached. No expectations. Time and love are the most valuable possession you can share.” Suze Orman

**Day 8:** “Sustainability, ensuring the future of life on Earth, is an infinite game, the endless expression of generosity on behalf

of all.” Paul Hawken

**Day 9:** “Gentleness, self-sacrifice and generosity are the exclusive possession of no one race or religion.” Mahatma Gandhi

**Day 10:** “Too many have dispensed with generosity in order to practice charity.” Albert Camus

**Day 11:** “Generosity is not giving me that which I need more than you do, but it is giving me that which you need more than I do.” Khalil Gibran

**Day 12:** “No one can occupy your generosity except you.” Gary Zukav

**Day 13:** “We would all like a reputation for generosity and we’d all like to buy it cheap.” Mignon McLaughlin

**Day 14:** “That’s what I consider true generosity: You give your all, and yet you always feel as if it costs you nothing.” Simone de Beauvoir



**Day 15:** “If we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we fear guilt or retribution.” J.M. Coetzee

**Day 16:** “But I give best when I give from that deeper place; when I give simply, freely and generously, and sometimes for no particular reason. I give best when I give from my heart.” Steve Goodier

**Day 17:** “If truth doesn’t set you free, generosity of spirit will.” Katerina Stoykova Klemer

**Day 18:** “The best way to convince a skeptic that you are trustworthy and generous is to be trustworthy and generous.” Steven Pinker

**Day 19:** “Generosity is the most natural outward expression of an inner attitude of ...loving-kindness.” Dalai Lama XIV

**Day 20:** “Of the various kinds of intelligence, generosity is the first.” John Surowiecki

**Day 21:** “To be creative, first we must be generous. Then we must have a quiet, indomitable belief in our own worth.” Donna Goddard

**Day 22:** “Be generous with your strengths and skills. They are not your private property, and they grow from being shared.” Joanna Macy

**Day 23:** “The Buddha and enlightened bodhisattvas are pictured as generous above all else. They give themselves—their time, their resources, their wisdom, and their compassionate action—to all living beings.” Dale S. Wright

**Day 24:** “In the realm of giving, true generosity means giving abundantly, and in taking, it’s the humility of accepting just enough.” Shree Shambav

**Day 25:** “No single act of generosity remains in isolation. The ripples are many.” Sarah Winman

**Day 26:** “Err on the side of generosity. Not because you want something in return. Banking on reciprocity is a recipe for manipulation. Be generous because you’re human and you care.” Richie Norton

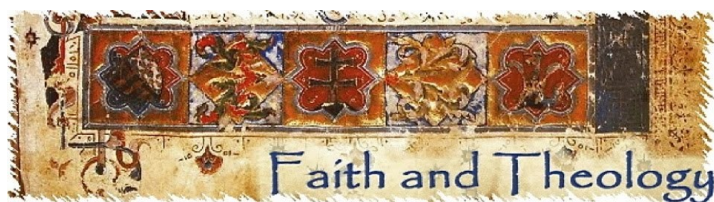
**Day 27:** “If you think you have nothing to give, it isn’t true. Be generous. No one is too poor to give.” Cuong Lu

**Day 28:** “Character is about integrity over time, trustworthiness over time, authenticity over time, generosity over time.” Carly Fiorina

**Day 29:** “... collectively they all taught us generosity, kindness, and inclusion, and that you always share what you have, even when it’s not much.” Sara Bareilles

**Day 30:** “Generosity is based in knowing what you are capable of giving, and going just a little beyond that.” Lodro Rinzler

**Day 31:** “If we stretch ourselves to open our minds, to see our shared humanity with others, we allow ourselves to see the existence of community and generosity in unexpected places.” Sharon Salzberg



## Faith and Theology

### A Theology of Generosity

A liberal theology of generosity is grounded in our first principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We are worthy of generosity and our dignity compels us to be generous. The Article II Study Commission chose generosity as a value to guide our faith into the future. They wrote, "Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality." We are connected despite background, socioeconomic status, beliefs, or other things that often divide. And, whenever possible, generosity is intended to be mutual. Our generosity ceases to be framed as a handout to the less fortunate. It becomes a radical affirmation of our shared humanity regardless of our ability to give or our need to receive.

Generosity challenges behavior characterized by competition where life is viewed as a zero-sum game by emphasizing trust, gratitude, and a willingness to share with others. Generosity is not conduct that is optional, nice to do, feel-good, or one-upmanship. It is a way of being, a moral imperative that calls us to work to create a more just and compassionate society.

Some equate being generous with giving more, the more given the greater the generosity. This defines generosity through a materialistic lens. It should be understood by spiritual intent not material amount. Due to intent, a modest gesture by someone with very limited means makes them generous, not less generous or more generous, but generous. While it may seem beside the point, generosity is not a countable noun. Beyond this, generosity is defined less by an individual act and more by an overall orientation to life. It transcends acts of charity or benevolence by embodying a profound shift in consciousness in relating to others. Generosity changes transactions into transformation.

A liberal theology of generosity challenges conventional notions of deservingsness and reciprocity. Gener-

osity is not contingent upon a recipient's merit but flows from a place of empathy and solidarity. It invites us to cultivate a spirit of generosity

that extends compassion toward everyone, including those who may not fit society's traditional criteria of worthiness. All are worthy. Ideally, our generosity radiates 360 degrees, embracing everyone around us.

Contrary to a narrative of scarcity, which breeds fear and hoarding, a theology of generosity invites a mindset of abundance. The folktale, *Stone Soup*, transforms fear and hoarding into abundance. This is an old story. The earliest version was by Madame de Noyer (1663–1719), a famous French journalist and woman of letters. Her version, *Soupe au Caillou*, was published one year after she died. An English version did not appear until 1808.

Other versions have appeared over time with different settings, characters, and plot lines but the result is always delicious soup. *Cactus Soup* by author Eric Kimmel and illustrator Phil Huling is set in San Miguel, Mexico. It begins with a cactus thorn. *Bone Soup* by Cambria Evans features the monster Finnegan, who persuades a town of monsters to help make bone soup. *Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth features three monks. Their stone soup contains many delicious ingredients from China. *Tumbleweed Stew* by author Susan Stevens Crummel and illustrator Janet Stevens is set in Texas. Jack Rabbit uses a tumbleweed to get the soup started. And finally, *Bone Button Borscht* by Aubrey Davis occurs in Eastern Europe. A beggar takes a button made of bone from his coat to start the borscht. In Germany, the soup has pebbles, in another country it is axe soup, while in a third version the soldier sells the stone to the villagers before he leaves.

One of the best known is the 1947 version by Marcia Brown, the one where three French soldiers enter a small village with the promise of making a most delicious soup with nothing but a stone. Imagine, just a stone. Out of assumed scarcity, each villager is persuaded that the ingredient that they are hoarding is the

very one that will transform the soup from merely good to magnificent. All the ingredients are equal in value, just one more thing to make the soup truly exceptional. Of course, children quickly understand that each villager is being tricked into contributing an ingredient.

But the story has more lessons to teach. The stone becomes a soup. The soup leads to a feast as bread, a roast, and wine are set out. The feast turns into a celebration with singing and dancing. The celebration results in hospitality as homes are opened and the soldiers are offered the best beds in the village in which to sleep. The hospitality was followed by gratitude for the lesson of how to make stone soup so they would never have to go hungry. Such abundance from a stone, but the rest was made possible through generosity.

It is a story about generosity and community and the common good. And what if the scarcity had been real, as it sometimes is? Generosity could still be made manifest. In its truest form, generosity is not diminished by scarcity, it is magnified. In times of need, acts of generosity can inspire hope, create solidarity, and foster social change.

A liberal theology of generosity emphasizes the importance of justice and equity, particularly in addressing societal structures and systems that perpetuate scarcity. It invites individuals to examine their privilege and reimagine generosity in ways that challenge systemic inequalities. It advocates for fair distribution of resources and opportunities, striving to undo the disparities that lead to scarcity.

At the heart of this perspective is the understanding that generosity is not merely an exchange of goods or resources but a spiritual practice that acknowledges our interdependence with all beings. This is made manifest through stewardship which emphasizes our responsibility to care for one another and for the Earth. Responsible management of resources, both individually and collectively is the first step. To approach the Earth with generosity is to acknowledge that the Earth is the prime source of generosity in our lives due to the magnificence, massive scale, and mystical nature of Creation. The only way to respond to her generosity is with our own.

## Family Matters

### Teaching Generosity

M. J. Ryan

...The Onondaga people ...teach their children about generosity. When it was time for someone to learn, the tribe would gather in a circle. The child would be brought into the center of the circle and given wonderful things to drink. After he had his fill, a voice would come from outside the circle, saying, "I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty," and the child would be encouraged to take the drink to the thirsty person. The child would be brought back into the circle and fed fabulous food. After, he would hear a voice outside the circle, saying, "I'm hungry, I'm hungry." Again, the child would leave the circle to feed the hungry person. The child would return to the circle and be given beautiful, warm clothes to wear. Again he would hear a voice, crying, "I'm cold, I'm cold," and he would gather up clothes and help dress the freezing person.

...Like any other aspect of parenting, we not only have to say what's right, we have to do what's right in order for our kids to learn. ...We must demonstrate clearly and consistently our own generosity.

...When you are doing something enjoyable with your child, like swimming, say something like, "We're having such fun. Let's take a minute to send this feeling of fun to all those kids who have never been in a pool." This way, they'll learn, just as the Native American kids did, that giving comes from a sense of well-being and that giving enhances the abundance that the giver is experiencing rather than diminishing it.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28416>

### Family Activity:

*Ways to Cultivate a Giving Spirit*  
Michele Borba

**Prioritize caring.** ...Prioritize charitableness.... ...Display photos of your kids engaged in thoughtful endeavors....

**Be a charitable role model.** ...Studies show that if parents are generous and giving, kids are likely to adopt those qualities.

**Make it a family routine.** A simple way to inspire children's generosity is by reinforcing it. Keep a box by your backdoor to encourage family members to donate their gently used toys, games or books.

**Acknowledge charitableness.** When your child acts in a kind-hearted way, say so: Thank them for being kind or helping out. **Use real events.** ...Talk about how you might help in the local community. It could be ...thinking about ways to assist the most vulnerable—like the homeless—during the winter.

**Start a "giving plan."** Encourage your children to give a portion of their allowance—or tooth fairy money—to a charity of their choice.

**Find your child's passion.** Kids are more likely to want to get involved in service projects that match their interests. Help your kids choose something they ...enjoy doing.

**Make charity a family affair....** Find a service to do together, like serving in a soup kitchen.

**Recap their impact.** ...Encourage your child to reflect on her volunteering experiences.... Remind your kids that their caring efforts are making a difference.

**Keep giving.** ...Look for ways to help your children experience the joy of giving on a regular basis....

Source: <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/for-parents/articles/2017-01-16/10-ways-to-raise-a-charitable-kid>



## A Good Thing

### Cultivating an Attitude of Generosity

Amy Love

Generosity is giving "good things," giving "freely," and giving "abundantly."

We can deepen our experience of generosity by moving from acts of generosity to cultivating an attitude of generosity.



When we embody an attitude of generosity, the good things we share expand out from deep within our hearts as an offering of freedom from fear—no one need fear that I will harm them, no one need fear that I will take from them what is not mine, no one need fear that I will cause harm with my words. To show up in the world, especially when working with youth, as love and safety, is generous beyond measure.

When we practice generosity, the "good things" that we give can take many forms. Certainly, some "things" are tangible items like toys, blankets, and food. Giving material things to help others is both a valuable and needed act of generosity. We can also give things like our time, our talents, and our full presence.... I have come to know that it is critical that we remember to give with respect and humility, acknowledging ourselves as equals in the giver-receiver relationship.

...Scientists are discovering generosity to be an ally to our health—from positive effects on mortality to physical and emotional wellness. On a relational level, generosity can be like connective tissue, connecting us with others through honest, loving engagement. Our communities thrive when we give freely and abundantly.

Source: <https://www.mindfulschools.org/personal-practice/what-does-it-mean-to-be-generous/>

# An Ongoing Exchange of Generosity and Gratitude

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme** and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." If generosity is just surplus, it costs nothing. Generosity is not the province of wealth or station. It is the gift all can give.

There are different definitions of generosity. The University of Notre Dame's *Science of Generosity Project* defines generosity as "the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly. ... What exactly generosity gives can be various things: money, possessions, time, attention, aid, encouragement, emotional availability, and more."

A discussion of generosity often touches on human nature. Is generosity exceptional because we are inherently selfish? While many believe that selfishness is our true nature, research has found that we have the propensity to be selfish and generous. This means that generosity is not simply a cultural construct but part of our nature. Selfishness may get more attention, but it appears that our instincts for generosity have deep evolutionary roots because of individual and communal benefits associated with generosity. So, what encourages generosity over selfishness?

Generosity has been linked to empathy, compassion, humility, and agreeableness. A person's values, morals, and sense of identity can also promote generosity. Gratitude, in particular, seems to encourage generosity. This is not related to what people have, but how they regard what they have. This takes us to the proverbial glass half-empty, glass half-full idiom, scarcity versus abundance and the corresponding sense of ingratitude versus gratitude. It is not just about being wealthy or poor but how people relate to what they have. Some studies show that many who are wealthy and poor are generous. For the latter, there is also the influence, as above, of noblesse oblige. Generosity is not defined by the size of the gift but by the intention behind it. The Greater Good Science Center offers a survey to assess our level of generosity. See [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take\\_quiz/altruism](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/altruism).

There is a continuum between stinginess and generosity symbolized from the

hand closed in a fist to the hand, palm up and wide open. Patti Digh writes, "Being generous often consists of simply extending a hand. That's hard to do if you are grasping tightly to your righteousness, your belief system, your superiority, your assumptions about others, your definition of normal." Of course, for the hand to be wide open the heart must also be wide open.

While our focus is often on individual generosity tied to individual benefit, individual generosity almost always confers communal benefit.

Generosity can counteract materialism by shifting the emphasis from the acquisition of things to the value of relationships, experiences, and contributions to the common good. Generosity tends to have a ripple effect. It can inspire others to act generously, motivated by kindness and goodwill in ways that can spread through communities and beyond.

This ripple effect was compellingly



conveyed in the movie, *Pay It Forward*, which was directed by Mimi Leder and released in 2000. Twelve-year-old Trevor McKinney accepts the challenge offered by his new social studies teacher, Mr. Simonet. The assignment is to think of something that will change the world and then put it into action. Trevor comes up with the idea of paying a favor—not back to the person who helped you, but forward with new good deeds done to three people. The ripple of one good deed, paid forward to 3 people, then 9, then 81, illustrates the exponential power of generosity as each person pays it forward to three others. By contrast, failure to pay things forward has a chilling effect. As Unitarian Universalist Barbara Rohde wrote, "Gifts that are not received die. Gifts that we try to hoard die. Gifts that we cannot or do

not hand to another die."

The practice of generosity should not be restricted to the less fortunate, the dispossessed, or strangers. It should also be practiced close to home within your circles of kinship and friendship. It is here that we can discover that generosity can be reciprocal. Often our presence is the source of our most profound generosity. As M. Scott Peck said, paying attention is a form of love. Having been generous, we should, suggests Lisa Firestone, accept the gratitude of those to whom we have been generous. She also recommends that we receive the generosity of others, an act that she calls, if we are reluctant, the generosity of acceptance. And then that we convey our gratitude. The reciprocity is an ongoing exchange of generosity and gratitude.

Generosity also benefits the giver. Research in psychology and neuroscience has found that acts of altruism and kindness trigger a cascade of physiological and psychological responses that promote well-being and happiness. The "helper's high," a sense of euphoria and fulfillment experienced when helping others, underscores the profound connection between generosity and personal fulfillment.

Similar to interdependence, one of the Study Commission's seven values, which touches the other six values, generosity can impact the other six values in positive ways as the following question considers.

What if each act of *generosity*

1. created an abundance of *love*,
2. affirmed our *interdependence*,
3. strengthened *pluralism* by honoring diversity,
4. helped bend the moral arc of the universe toward *justice*,
5. lead to *transformation*, and
6. recognized the need for *equity*?

This is precisely what each act of generosity can do.

Like the Golden Rule, generosity encourages empathy, compassion, and reciprocity in service of harmony and well-being. As a value to guide our faith, generosity is a worthy addition.

## Open Your Heart

### Something to Give

*Diane Eshin Rizzetto*

We always have something to give. Sometimes, all we can give is the gift of ourselves—our intention to be fully present and respectful, to meet others with openness. We can give our story or listen to another's story. We can give our fearlessness, encouragement, or silent support of all kinds. We can give our stability or effort. We can give speaking and listening from the heart.

We can also be practicing giving to ourselves with an open magnanimous mind. Putting ourselves first is some-



times the generous thing to do, but without magnanimous mind, it's self-indulgence.

This is a tricky one and not always easy to discern. But, from the perspective of Zen, all giving begins with our-

selves. We can give ourselves the opportunity to be fully present in the experience of anger, aware of our clenching teeth and tensing muscles. We can give ourselves the experience of the pounding heart of fear. We can give ourselves the experience of the heavy body and tearful eyes of sadness. To open our heart and minds to our experience is a form of giving and receiving.

When we open to our experience in this way, we relinquish the boundaries, we can lean into its circumference and question deeply held requirements in the self's thinking about how it should be or needs to be. This is also generosity.

When we give ourselves the gift of relinquishing that requirement, we open up the space to turn toward the experience of what's happening. And we open to those experiences. This is generosity—openness, acceptance, allowing.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28487>

## The Sparrow Cries

### Ten Thousand Miles Away

*Andrew Harvey*

One day Rumi asked one of his young, snotty disciples to give him an enormous amount of rich and delicious food. This young disciple was rather alarmed because he thought Rumi was living an ascetic lifestyle. Rumi used to pray all night and eat hardly anything. The disciple thought, "Aha, now I've really got the master—what he really wants to do is to go off somewhere secretly and eat all this food!" So, he decided to follow Rumi. He followed him through the streets of Konya, out into the fields, out into yet further fields. Then he saw Rumi go into a ruined tomb. "I'm finally going to unmask his pretensions," the young disciple thought. But what he found was a totally exhausted dog with six puppies, and Rumi was feeding the dog with his own hands so that she could survive to feed her children. Rumi



knew that the disciple was following him, of course, and turned to him smiling and said, "See?" The disciple, extremely moved, asked, "But how on earth did you know that she was here? How did you know that she was hungry? This is miles away from where you are!" Rumi laughed and laughed, "When you have become awake your ears are so acute that they can hear the cries of a sparrow ten thousand miles away."

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17219>

## A Generous Heart

### How Generosity Leads to Awakening

*Sharon Salzberg*

The cultivation of generosity is the beginning of spiritual awakening. Generosity has tremendous force because it arises from an inner quality of letting go. Being able to let go, to give up, to renounce, and to give generously all spring from the same source, and when we practice generosity ...we open



up these qualities within ourselves. Letting go gives us profound freedom and many loving ways to express that freedom.

The practice of generosity is about creating space. We see our limits and we extend them continuously, which creates an expansiveness and spaciousness of mind that's deeply composed.

...Think about what it's like when the opposite is happening, when the mind feels brittle, narrow, confined and dark. ...It's not very easy because of the narrowness of the mind that is receiving it. By contrast, a vast and spacious mind doesn't feel so bound, contracted and self-denigrating.

Conversely, when a pleasant experience arises, we don't lunge at it with desperation, because we don't really need it. ...What better way to be able to look at the vast array of experiences that come and go than with a spacious, generous heart?

[...] We also practice generosity to free others, to extend welfare and happiness to all beings, to somehow, as much as each one of us can, lessen the suffering in this world. When our practice of generosity is genuine, when it's complete, we realize inner spaciousness and peace, and we also learn to extend boundless caring to all living beings.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=481>

# Small Group Discussion Guide

## Theme for Discussion

### Generosity

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** "I think that generosity has many levels. We have to think generously, speak generously, and act generously. Thinking well of others and speaking well of others is the basis for generous giving. It means that we relate to others as part of our 'gen' or 'kin' and treat them as family. Generosity cannot come from guilt or pity. It has to come from hearts that are fearless and free and are willing to share abundantly all that is given to us."

*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

**Chalice Lighting:** (James Vila Blake)

(adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** "Practice giving things away, not just things you don't care about, but things you do like. Remember, it is not the size of a gift, it is its quality and the

amount of mental attachment you overcome that count. So don't bankrupt yourself on a momentary positive impulse, only to regret it later. Give thought to giving. Give small things, carefully, and observe ...the act of releasing the little thing you liked." *Robert A F Thurman*

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. Why is generosity an important value?
2. What moves us toward being selfish? Generous? In what ways has your cup been half-empty? Half-full?
3. What role do upbringing, culture, and society play in shaping one's capacity for generosity?
4. What story comes to mind of experiencing generosity? What happened, and how did you feel?
5. What effect does gratitude have on generosity?
6. In what ways does generosity have a ripple effect?
7. What are some of the benefits of being generous?
8. How does intent inform generosity?
9. How can generosity contribute to building stronger communities and fostering social cohesion?
10. What are the barriers to generosity that affect you in your daily life?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice:** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words:** Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

# Revolutionary

## Inspiring Generosity

*Barbara Bonner*

Generosity is an activity that can change the world. It works its magic on one person at a time; then, almost effortlessly, its beautiful multiplying force animates families, friends, communities, cultures, and the world at large.

Unlike its close cousin, compassion, generosity requires *action*. To be a generous person, you must act.

...Generosity is a practice. And as with anything we practice, we get better at it over time.

...Generosity can be revolutionary.

...Generosity is often quite bold, ignoring the advice of friends and family and moving forward with courage and conviction.

Generosity is willing to take risks. In fact, risks have little constraint on a generous heart.

Generosity invites us to put ourselves in another's shoes, see and feel the existence of a



pressing need, realize that it is within our power to help, and then act in whatever way we can. It's really as simple as that.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/26297>

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