

For the Love of Giving
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Have any of you ever watched Boston Legal? It's a pretty racy show about lawyers with William Shatner in the lead role. He has come a long way from Captain Kerk in this one I tell you.

Gary and I watched several episodes of this series and in one of them a lawyer tells a story. This is how it goes:

A young girl opens the door to let her dog in and he has the next door neighbor's rabbit in his mouth. The girl is horrified. She loves her dog so much, and she is worried that now he will be taken from her. So, she gets an idea. She gently pries the rabbit out of the dog's mouth, washes it, blow dries it and puts it back in its cage hoping her neighbors will think it died of natural causes.

That evening, the woman who lives next door shows up and the young girl overhears her saying to her mom, "Sally, the weirdest thing happened. Our rabbit died and we buried him in the back yard. When we came home today, it was back in its cage and all cleaned up! Now what kind of sicko would dig up our bunny, clean him off and put him back in his cage?"

This got me to thinking about the truths in me that I fluff up or clean up in order to keep them alive when it is long past time that I let them go. One of these that has been ready for some time to let go of is the idea of scarcity, that there is not enough, that the limits of my own personal or financial status, just do not allow me to be generous with my resources. A colleague, Will Saunders, writes: "Money is the way in which we express our aspirations, our dreams, our beliefs, our ideals. Money

can be used to build up or to tear down, to serve or to dominate, to liberate or to oppress." And I would add, money can be used or not used to keep us small, stuck, lost, afraid.

Giving changes who we are, fundamentally. When we do not let go of the grasping, the sense that there is just not enough to go around and others have so much more than I do and they will just have to give from this place of excess because I have to hold onto what I have, we stay small, we remain scarce, we ourselves become not enough.

Maria Nemeth in a book entitled The Energy Of Money says that how we deal with money is how we deal with all of life. She refers to physics, and here I quote: *Because we all share in the universal energy that unifies us, no compartment of life is shut off from another. The smallest parts of life and matter reflect the properties of the universe as a whole. Physicist David Bohm called this the holographic universe: every aspect of our lives has a reflection in every other aspect. This means how you do money is how you do life. Our relationship with money is a metaphor for our relationship with all forms of energy: time, physical vitality, enjoyment, creativity, and the support of friends.*

Nemeth asks us to look at how we spend our time, distribute our love, how we relate to our bodies and our health and says that each of these also corresponds to how we use our money. In other words, the way we spend or do not spend money reflects the way we give or do not give of ourselves, which in turn effects our health, our world view, our sense of wonder, gratitude, hope.

I have been thinking lately that I would like to spend my money in alignment with my values. I thought this was a grand idea until I tried to really apply it. Someone said to me, If you want to know what you value, look at your checkbook. Very hard to live by! My checkbook has entries for lipstick, for face creams reported to decrease signs of aging, for new clothes and new shoes. There was not a single entry, except for my recent pledge to this Meeting House, that reflects what I believe in with the exception perhaps of my commitment to sustainable living through local food choices.

What would it mean to spend our resources in alignment with our values? What do you value? What do you care about? To answer these questions I ask myself other questions: What brings me a sense of vitality, community, care, hope, wonder, and peace? To all of these, my answer always includes this Meeting House congregation. This is a place that sustains our lives, literally, in joy and in sorrow, in love and in fear, in abundance and loss.

By giving to this Meeting House, we are putting in our share to make it possible for us all, together as one, to be the Meeting House and do what the Meeting House does to make a difference in our lives and in the larger world. We need to shift our thinking about this from consumer to partner.

Ask not what you get for your dollars. The answer to that is- plenty! Ask instead, what does it mean to show up and give, give until I have risked letting go of something that no longer serves me?

I know what it is to feel there is not enough. I went to the New Seminary in NYC from 2007-2009. I met once a month for 2 years with people from all over the

world, of every faith, and we studied together and pushed on the limits of our faith and service together. There was a retreat offered at the end of each of these 2 years for 5 days at an abbey on the Hudson River. For the first year, I got a scholarship. I did not have a lot of resources at that time. I had been a single mother for 18 years and had worked hard but never been able to save much.

The second year, I did not take the scholarship. I wrote a check instead and in doing so, I arrived at that retreat in a different way. Invested, having taken some responsibility for the future of the program so that others might enjoy what I had received, I arrived more vulnerable, more willing to be changed because I was part of the event in a new way. I decided that I had enough and in doing so, I felt I was enough too. I offered my first public dance class that year at the retreat and soon after opened a small dance company and started dancing and teaching dance.

Giving lifts a burden of isolation, of being separate, of being unable. Giving, not just what we can give without realizing it, but giving so that we know we are giving, giving so that we notice we have given, changes us. When we let go of the fear that there is not enough and give our resources to what sustains us and gives us courage and hope, give our resources to what we believe in, we are freed.

Freed from smallness and not enough and from holding so tight the holding becomes a way of life and the white knuckles of our clasping begin to relax. When we open our hands, our hearts follow, our breath follows, our lives follow and there is so much more we are able to receive with open hands and hearts, with a life that is awake and able to turn outward because inwardly we are fed by the knowing that we are enough, that we have enough to share, that indeed our lives are so valuable,

so rich, that we can offer ourselves and resources to each other and only be made richer.

This is the goal right. To live with a little less fear that we are not enough, to live with a little less grasping, holding on, insisting that what we have is so little it cannot be shared and it is others who must open their minds, hearts, lives, resources to share with us because we have so little. Having so little becomes being so little, becomes loneliness, becomes fear.

It may seem during pledge season that the finance committee, the members fund drive committee, the minister and other church leaders are asking you for money. But that is not what we are asking. We are asking you to make a decision to join this congregation fully, to join us in sustaining a place where we can come and be fed, come and be whole, come and laugh and grieve and hope and cry. Come and learn from each other, come and teach each other.

What we are asking for is that each of us bring what we have to give, and not only what we have to give easily, but what we have to give that we will notice giving and that we give it, that we invest in this world we build together that sustains us. And as we give, the sustenance of this world grows and we are fed so much more than we expected.

As we show up and make commitments, our strength grows, our warmth grows, our hope grows, our knowing that we are not alone grows until we are richer, each of us. Until we grow richer, each of us, until we are bursting with gifts to give to those we meet because we are so well fed by each other.

I close with the words of John Wolf, the minister emeritus of the Unitarian Universalist church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who once catalogued for his congregation some reasons for supporting the church:

- You want to support it because it stands against superstition and fear. Because it points to what is noblest and best in human life. Because it is open to men and women of whatever race, creed, color, or place of origin or sexual orientation.
- You want to support it because it has a free pulpit. Because you can hear ideas expressed here which could cost any other minister his or her job. You want to support it because it is a place where children can come without being saddled with guilt or terrified of some "celestial peeping-tom", where they can learn that religion is for joy, for comfort, for gratitude and love.
- You want to support it because it is a place where walls between people are torn down rather than built up. Because it is a place for the religiously displaced persons of our time - the refugees from mixed marriages, the unwanted free thinkers, and those who insist against orthodoxy that they must work out their own beliefs.
- You want to support this Unitarian Universalist church because it is more concerned with human beings than with dogmas. Because it searches for the Holy rather than dwelling upon the depraved. Because it calls no one a sinner, yet knows how deep is the struggle in each person's breast and how great is the hunger for what is good.

- You want to support this Unitarian Universalist church because we can laugh... You want to support it because it insults neither your intelligence nor your conscience, and because it calls you to worship what is truly worthy of your sacrifice.

Let's give to this the community that we receive so much from. This community that walks with us no matter what comes, to this the place where we make meaning of our lives together, to this the place in which we are encouraged and nurtured toward becoming more of what we are set upon this earth to be.