



MUSINGS *of* MODERN

GOOD DEEDS SEEK



*Is it Better to
Give Than to
RECEIVE?*

BY DARCY SIMONSON

You have probably heard more than once, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). For years this idea helped me rationalize compulsive shopping during the holidays. “It is practically dictated by the Bible!” I’d quip, while my husband sorted through Visa receipts. But what if the gift is given reluctantly, comes from the motivation to get back or buy favor, or is given merely because a date on the calendar dictates it? With these questions in mind, Sheila and I wonder, during this season of giving, if it is always more blessed to give than to receive.

There comes a time when years of habitual behaviors born of cultural expectations reveal themselves as, well, silly. When you shop for family and friends, you are in a sense giving of yourself, but what if there were no catalogs or department stores? What, then, would you have to give? Yourself. From you flows a plethora of beautiful and unique God-given gifts, like talents and wisdom, abilities and characteristics, time and attention. When we share these, as is our natural inclination, we are living and giving authentically while creating memories for both the person you give to, and yourself. Imagine, the day after Christmas, having nothing to stuff into over-filled closets while you enjoy the warmth of your overflowing heart.

The fact is, we live in a country where beautiful trinkets are readily accessible. They can be symbols of our love and affection, or of obligation, duty, or selfishness. There is nothing wrong with purchasing something special for someone, but if you want to give of yourself and break the cycle of habitual or obligatory giving, pause and examine the motivation behind the gift. How do you feel when you give it? Is it heartfelt and authentic? See it honestly, and depending on what reveals itself, you may choose to give differently. As the poet, Kahlil Gibran, wrote, “You give little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”

When you receive, you give.

In a story from the book, *Mother Teresa, Her Essential Wisdom*, Mother Teresa was faced with receiving a gift of change from a very poor man. Because the man was poor, and his donation would likely cause him to go to bed hungry, she considered declining the gift. However, in her wisdom, she chose to accept it. She describes his immense joy in having given, what she called his joy of loving, and knew she’d made the right decision. Her story illustrates that when we give, we receive, as the beggar experienced through joy. But perhaps equally important, when we

receive, we give, as did Mother Teresa in acceptance of his gift. Had she refused his offering, the beggar may have gone to bed with his stomach full, but his heart left empty.

Receiving has never been one of my strong suits. I suppose under the scrutiny of a talented psychoanalyst the reason might reveal itself, but suffice it to say, I am not yet enlightened enough to receive with the grace of Mother Teresa. Perhaps Robert Greenleaf sums it up accurately in *On Becoming a Servant Leader*, “Receiving requires genuine humility that may be uncomfortable and difficult to achieve, whereas giving poses the risk of arrogance which, unfortunately, is easy to come by.” Touché.

Time reveals truth, however, and with maturity I realize that the times that I had not graciously accepted gifts (nor compliments or assistance for that matter), I was essentially rejecting love and denying the giver her joy. Did I do so out of insecurity, humility, or pride? Whatever the case may have been, I’ve realized that receiving is a contract with the Universe that I had not fully appreciated, with one exception: gushing over bouquets of dandelions. So, why is it I can easily accept a fist full of wilted weeds from a child? Perhaps because they are given from the child’s heart, radiating joy and dripping with kindness. They are given with such pure love, I can only accept them with the same. My challenge now is to sense the heart of all of those who present me with a gift, be it flowers, or trinkets, or time, in the same way that I do a little child’s; then to allow myself the gift of love that is being offered to me. As St. Gregory of Narek wrote, “I look not upon the gift, but upon the giver.”

Giving from the heart is certainly a blessed act, but graciously receiving seems to be the equally blessed counterpart, because by doing so we, too, give. With this in mind, Sheila and my wish for you during this season of giving is that every gift you give is a genuine expression of your love, and that you receive knowing you, too, are loved. After all, isn’t that what we really want?

Darcy Simonson and Sheila Sornsin created
The Grateful Goddess.

WWW.THEGRATEFULGODDESS.COM