

# Generosity With Each Other

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When I moved to the East Coast a few years ago, I loaded up a 16-foot Penske truck in Berkeley and went down to Los Angeles to get some things I had in storage to then drive to New Jersey. I had sold my condo a couple years before to help me get through seminary without student loans and had placed some things in storage there. I was traveling in Los Angeles at that point, all loaded up, and pulled into a Starbucks to take a Frapuccchino on the road with me.

Unbeknownst to myself, I had pulled into the lot the wrong way and began to turn my truck around to gain entry into the drive through lane. As I performed this maneuver, I waved at a woman to enter the line and she allowed me in. I gave my order and started to pull up when she yelled out the window of her SUV, "So you couldn't go around like everyone else, you had to cut in!" I'm so sorry, I replied, I'm just passing through and thought you had said it was okay to pull in. I was preoccupied with this 16-foot truck and didn't know I pulled in the wrong way and I was sorry to inconvenience her. It rattled me though that she was so angry she felt the need to scream at me out of her car. So when I approached the window to pay for my order I asked what hers was and paid for that too. It was a momentary immediate notion that somehow was placed in my head to ward off my own anger and frustration. It wasn't intentional for me to "cut" in line, but rather than fume at the anger this woman sent my way, I decided to give a random act of kindness. I don't know how she reacted as I just drove away afterwards, but I do know that I felt better. I didn't want to begin my journey with angry or frustrated feelings. It was too exciting to begin this trek and I wanted to enjoy it.

I also didn't want to leave this woman with her own angry feelings. I have no idea what her day had been like up to that point, maybe she had screaming children in the car or was caring for an elderly parent, but something obviously was bothering her. We don't lash out at people when we are in a good mood and feeling on top of the world. That's usually when we feel generous, feel grateful, for all that life is giving us.

The word generosity has evolved through various derivations throughout the centuries. It began from the Latin meaning of "noble birth," passed down to English from the French word *genereux*. The stem *gener* is from the *genus* meaning kin or clan and that's where the aristocratic sense of noble lineage came from. To be generous, it states in *The Science of Generosity*, was to literally say to belong to nobility.

So in the 17<sup>th</sup> century however the meaning began to change. Generosity and its meaning transformed from an aristocratic sense and one of nobility to a generosity of spirit. It did not hinge on family history but on whether or not a person actually possessed these qualities. And it not only signified one definition, but began to include similar qualities that were felt to be noble, one of courage, gallantry, and fairness. As well, the term generosity began to describe fertile land, abundant provisions of food or the potency of medicine.

The term continued to evolve from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to present day to mean open-handedness and the kindness of giving money and possessions to others. It meant that a person had virtue and noble character. In modern usage today, it has become a trait of ordinary people, not just for nobility and is practiced by those folks of greater goodness or higher quality. It is an ideal that we are taught to aspire to reach and that we should be called to a higher standard. Our words evolve and continue to evolve but in our present day, to be generous is to hold a distinctive character towards others, a morality that will benefit others. We give in abundance to those who need it, to those who will benefit of it, and that we are giving something that they want, something to enhance their lives and help to give it meaning. It is a high standard to be generous. It means we are a good and well-meaning person. It also means that we are not the opposite. We are not selfish or greedy or cruel. We also do not give to enhance our own interests. To be truly generous is to be authentic in giving without expecting anything in return. <https://generosityresearch.nd.edu/more-about-the-initiative/what-is-generosity/> Studies have been done, which I will not cite today, on the effect of generosity on others and how generosity not only affects the person who receives it, but also can go on to affect others, witnesses, bystanders, even strangers. The Pay it Forward effect was in style many years ago, where it actually became popular to pay it forward to another person so that they too could pay it forward and so on and so on and so on, effecting essentially our entire planet. They even made a movie about this phenomenon called Pay it Forward.

I always feel good when I give to others. It is a habit that enhances my life, I feel, as much as it enhances the recipient. For true generosity does not expect anything in return. If we are expecting something in return than that is not generosity. A term we've been hearing about a lot lately for this behavior is called Quid Pro Quo. I'll do something nice for you if you do something nice for me. I do not see the value in that. Truly giving is something that comes from the heart.

Generosity isn't really addressed in our Seven Principles. Individualism also isn't addressed in our Seven Principles. The ethics inherent in our Principles define that way of life we all aspire to. And yet so many of us feel the need to be an individual, the need to show how independent in thought, word and deed we truly are. That's where our covenant comes into play. We covenant with each other to set boundaries on how we will treat each other, how we will respect the individuality of each other while being in community with one another. That is not an easy goal to accomplish. Soon we will begin to create a covenant for this congregation so that we will all agree on how to treat each other. I discovered that this congregation does not have a covenant written out, a covenant of right relations on how to resolve conflict, how to work together, what our boundaries with each other can be and how to develop leadership within the congregation while aiding in transforming each other and this community. So we will begin in a few weeks to create this covenant, make decisions on what to include, how to treat each other, how you intend to interact with each other. And I will ask that you bring your generosity of spirit with you to this endeavor. For to create a covenant of right relations we will all need to bring a generosity of compromise and compassion to this undertaking. The best time to do this is not when we or some of us are in conflict. The best time is when everything feels that it is working smoothly, when there is not any conflict, so that we can look candidly at what our expectations of ourselves and others need to be to create that beloved community

that we wish to see. And to do this, we need to be generous. We need to be aware of other's needs and wishes and work towards finding an arrangement that will be beneficial to all. That is indeed a delicate and responsible act on all our parts. We must be cognizant of each other's feelings, ideas, conflicts and wants and then pursue the correct wording to define all of this so that we all can work together seamlessly and attentively. It might not be an easy task, but it will be an exciting one, for isn't this what beloved community means? In these days of comfortableness and easy acceptance of each other, when all seems to be working seamlessly, this is the time to create that covenant that will determine how we will treat each other in the future when possibly things may not be going as well.

It is in projects such as this that we can practice how to be generous with each other. We can use these moments to hone our skills of communication, commitment and love for each other, to deepen our relationships with each other and to show our generosity for one another. I will read a poem now from Marta Valentin, who is the Professional Development Director in the Ministry and Faith Development staff group of the UUA. I believe her words hold so much power when speaking of generosity and covenant.

## **IN GATHERINGS**

Poetry

By [Marta I Valentín](#)

In gatherings we are stirred  
like the leaves of the fall season  
rustling around sacred trees,  
tossed hither and yon  
until we come to rest together,  
quietly, softly . . .  
We come to gather strength from each other.  
We come to give strength to each other.  
We come to ask for strength from the Spirit of All That Is and Is Not.

When our hearts sing or when they frown  
it is the way of compassion telling us to give.  
It is the way of peace telling us  
to share our gifts,  
for we are happiest  
and most powerful  
when Love is made apparent  
in and through us.

Spirit of the circle that is Love,  
as we twirl in this dance that is life  
we give thanks for reminding us each day  
of our task of ministering to each "other"

with a searching glance,  
a safe touch,  
a generous smile,  
a thoughtful word...

Thank you for reminding us  
that we are always building our beloved *comunidad*.

Thank you for reminding us  
that through our covenant with you  
we covenant with each "other"  
and are made whole.

In gratitude, we celebrate  
with open hearts and minds.  
We discover who we are,  
separate from each other  
and within one another.

In this circle that holds all life  
may we ever work toward  
widening its boundaries  
until there are none.

Amen. Paz. Blessed Be.

Source: ["Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood"](#)

We gather together for a purpose, for one of spiritual community, individual spiritual awakening, and as Rev. Lisa Ward says, a dance of co-creation, keeping in step with one another in the flow of our lives, when she describes a covenant. She goes on to say:  
A covenant leaves room for chance and change, it is humble toward evolution. It claims: *I will abide with you in this common endeavor, be present as best as I can in our becoming*. This calls for a level of trust, courage and sacrifice that needs to be nurtured, renewed and affirmed on a regular basis. Thank you Rev. Lisa Ward.

We also call on each other to be generous, to keep at bay those feelings of need, of want, for those things we deem so important that they become the last stand for us at all costs. Is that last stand which we so vehemently hold on to really that important in the scheme of things? Will we fight to the end to keep that one word which we deem vital when others do not see the necessity? Those will be the objects in our path possibly when we create a covenant. Or possibly not. We need to become more generous with each other, more open to compromise, more exposed and vulnerable in our generosity. That is not an easy thing to do. And yet for us to achieve that beloved community of which we all aspire, that congregation that feels inclusive, is inclusive and loving beyond comprehension, we must take those first steps in openness and vulnerability with those in this congregation who we feel a deep love and

connection with. It can be humbling to be generous, it can be soothing to be loving, it can be so connecting to be part of a community that contains the love and dependability that a spiritual community can bring.

So this week, remember generosity in all forms. Remember that we are here to trust each other. We are here to have courage to accept and celebrate life with each other, through thick and thin, through joys and sorrows, with excitement and with solemnity. Generosity comes in many forms. Let us begin to use it on a daily basis.

When I was in the line in Starbucks with my truck, I could have screamed back at the woman who screamed at me. For some reason, that option did not enter my mind. There was grace in the air that day that caused me to see with new eyes. And in seeing with new eyes, I was open to generosity of spirit and not retaliation or anger. In this world today, there is too much retaliation and anger. It must be us who will offer generosity instead. It won't be easy, it could be futile, but it will always be welcomed. In our hearts let us hold these generous notions and know deeply that they can do good in the world.

Final words from Rev. Lisa Ward: We know that we are interconnected and that what we do creates ripples of hope or despair, of affirmation or negation. What we do with and for one another is powerful and beyond our imagining.

May it be so. Blessed be.