

## THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

### Generosity

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In this learning laboratory called First Unitarian, we witness innumerable, incredible acts of generosity. I'm speaking, of course, of gifts of time, talent and, yes ... treasure.

Sometimes a gift of treasure is large in the numerical sense, and the seemingly impossible has become a reality for us.

Many times, the gift is modest, and yet we're humbled to witness the giver who has sacrificed a personal pleasure, in an act of service to this community.

Greater still are the number and quality of gifts of talent and time – that most precious commodity of all. We honour the countless members and friends who do what has to be done, week in and week out, project by project or task by task.

Granted, all this giving isn't completely selfless. Studies suggest that regardless of whether we're generous with our time or money, the "reward centre" of the brain releases feel-good chemicals, spurring us to engage in *more* kind acts – something psychologists call "helpers high". As well, being generous with our time is linked to feelings of happiness, improved physical health and better emotional wellbeing. It seems science bears out the old proverb - "a little fragrance clings to the hand that gives the rose."

A simple, yet oft overlooked dimension on the same theme are those fleeting encounters when we're blessed by *Generosity of Spirit*. The sincere compliment or the rare courtesy; the kind soul who gives us space to be who we truly are or meets our limitations and imperfections with the benefit of the doubt. Upon receiving such kindness, we may even pledge to pay it forward, especially if we've been awakened by kindness to the realization that stress and strain has pulled us into an unconscious state of spiritual stinginess!

Annie Dillard puts it this way:

"the impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes."

I hope this month's theme inspires you to spend something good now, while also taking time to be extra generous with yourself, along the way.

Spirit of Love, help us to remember our place in the interdependent web of all existence. May we stay open to possibilities, giving freely and abundantly of our presence, our knowledge and our resources, as co-conspirators with Life itself.

In faith and love,

Angela

## Questions to Live With



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1. What has been your hardest act of generosity?
2. How might life be calling you to be generous in a new way in your closest relationships?
3. Without knowing it, we all put boundaries and limits around our generosity. How might the storylines and beliefs passed on to you by your family or society be hemming in what you have to give to the world?
4. Do you have trouble giving yourself permission to receive the generosity or help of others? What storyline might be hemming in your ability to *receive* that generosity?
5. How good are you at being generous with yourself?
6. If these questions don't address how you need to explore generosity this month, what is your question?

## For Inspiration

But make no mistake, generosity doesn't stop there, at care and connection. It also challenges. True generosity doesn't just ask us to care for people, it also asks us to call them out.

- Soul Matters Generosity PDF

Without love, you cannot survive.  
Without generosity, you cannot thrive.

- Hrishikesh Agnihotri, *Enrich The World With Your Presence : HA's Original Quotes, Volume 01*

Every gift you give, will multiply a hundred-fold.

- Lailah Gifty Akita, *Think Great: Be Great!*

The best things to do with the best things in life is to give them away.

- Dorothy Day

I have noticed that most times, the least that you give out is the best that someone really needs. So, don't always wait till you have something big to give before you do so! Someone's "big" is your "little"!

- Israelmore Ayivor, *Daily Drive 365*

... collectively they all taught us generosity, kindness, and inclusion, and that you always share what you have, even when it's not much. My parents managed to construct a little safe haven for my sisters and me to build ourselves within, which seems almost impossible to me when I think about how quickly childhood seems to disappear these days. They have taught me about the truest kind of love: the kind that is steadfast and strong, even when it changes shape.

- Sara Bareilles, *Sounds Like Me: My Life (So Far)* in Song

Stars shine even for those who refuse to look up.

- Matshona Dhliwayo

Generosity has little to do with giving gifts, and everything to do with giving space to others to be who they are.

- Patti Digh

True Forgiveness is one of the highest acts of Generosity.

- Chandima Gangodawila

Above the consciousness level of the heart, we need a teacher and a guide. It is somebody who “knows”, who has walked further on the path than us and who can guide, encourage and inspire us. There is an Indian saying: “When the disciple is ready, the teacher occurs.

- Swami Dhyani Giten, *The Call of the Heart*

Generosity says a great deal about a person's emotional and spiritual development. When it's hard to give, or it feels like ripping away a part of the self, we are still anchored in our attachments or stories we've created about scarcity. If this applies to you, make friends with the part of you that feels resentful or finds it difficult to give.

- Charlotte Kasl, *If the Buddha Dated: A Handbook for Finding Love on a Spiritual Path*

There aren't nearly enough worldly mansions for the kind folks who deserve them.

- Bryant A. Loney, *To Hear The Ocean Sigh*

We would be wise to accumulate things for the sole purpose of sharing their joys with others.

- Barbara Lynn-Vannoy

They looked at me, and were so full of delight in the pleasure they were giving me that some final thread of resistance gave way and I understood not only how entirely generous they were but also that generosity might be the greatest pleasure there is.

- William Maxwell, *So Long, See You Tomorrow*

If you want to live forever, give yourself away for others.

- Debasish Mridha

This is mine, and this is not -  
Thus do the small-minded see.  
The large-hearted have always thought  
The world itself a family.

- Narayan Pandit, *The Hitopadesa*

Asking for and receiving help is a way to prime the pump of generosity.

- Jay Perry, *Take Charge of Your Talent: Three Keys to Thriving in Your Career, Organization, and Life*

Generosity is based in knowing what you are capable of giving, and going just a little beyond that.

- Lodro Rinzler, *The Buddha Walks into a Bar...: A Guide to Life for a New Generation*



*Photo by Beth MacDonald on Unsplash*

I will not hesitate.  
I will not hang back.  
I will go and offer my heart,  
for it is what I have to give...

- Kate Mullane Robertson

The heart is a generous muscle.

- Sharon Salzberg, *Real Love: The Art of Mindful Connection*

There is nothing more critical than to exercise the generosity to let something end with the grace it started with.

- Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi

It is on the consciousness level of the heart that we begin to understand that we are not separated from life. We begin to understand that we are not small separate islands in a great ocean, but that life is one and that we all are small parts of the Whole. We begin to understand what is really important and meaningful in life. It is on the consciousness level of the heart that we begin to understand that life is about sharing, rather than hoarding. We begin to understand that life is about giving, rather than taking.

We keep what we give away.

- Tim Hiller, *Strive: Life is Short Pursue What Matters*

Life doesn't begin when you start breathing; it begins when you start living, giving and loving.

- Michael Bassey Johnson, *The Book of Maxims, Poems and Anecdotes*

Earth would be such a better place every second of every day if we could just show up with an attitude of generosity and gratitude, and acceptance for one another.

- Elisabeth Sheff, *Stories From the Polycule: Real Life in Polyamorous Families*



Photo by Avel Chutkhanov on Unsplash

## Optional Spiritual Exercise

### Lend Life a Hand

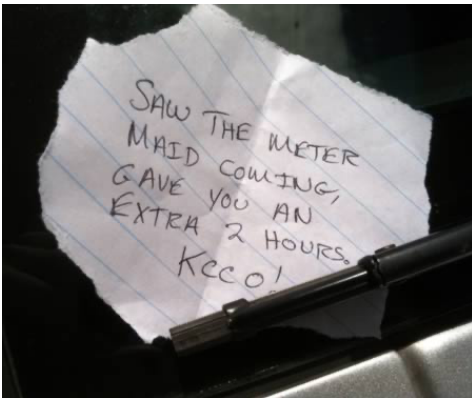
Life doesn't just lavish generous gifts on us; it also often invites us to be part of the lavishing. It's sneaky that way. It likes to enlist us as its partner-in-crime. This exercise asks us to explore that more deeply— it asks us to notice how we are **both** givers and receivers of life's generosity.

Simply put, your challenge is **to find a way to bring life's generosity to someone's life**. That may seem simple, but there is one big, challenging rule you must follow:

#### **They can't know you were involved!**

In other words, your task is not to do a "good deed". It is to help someone experience life differently. The goal is to remind someone that *life itself* is generous, not stingy. Open, not closed. Full of surprises, not threats. If they know you are involved, it will only convince them that *you* are generous. (But this doesn't mean you can't find a place to hide and watch!)

Here is some inspiration to help you. (Notice that some of these ideas involve you bringing life's goodness to a stranger or many people at once. That's not cheating at all. Do whatever inspires you.)



Check out this post:  
[http://www.oddee.com/item\\_98410.aspx](http://www.oddee.com/item_98410.aspx)



Watchthismovie: *Amélie*-  
<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/amelie/>

Come to your group prepared not only to tell the story of how you gave life a hand, but also to share your answers to these questions:

1. Was remaining anonymous harder than you thought? Did the difficulty have more to do with you wanting credit or with you wanting to vicariously experience the recipient's joy?
2. Why did you choose the recipient(s) you did?
3. How was this spiritual for you? Did it just make you feel happy? Or something more?

# Join Us

## Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website [firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/](https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/).

## Upcoming Themes

November – Generosity | December – Mystery | January – Liberating Love | February – Justice & Equity | March – Transformation | April – Interdependence | May – Pluralism

## Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

November 5 | Showing Up When It's Difficult  
Dallas Bergen

November 19 | A Gentle Legacy  
Maya Ferguson Klinowski

November 12 | More Than We Deserve  
Rev. Victoria Ingram

November 26 | 21<sup>st</sup> Century Commitment  
Rev. Stephen Atkinson

## The Journey Team

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