



Chiropractic Newsletter

Well-Being

Living in the Gift

Why does the sun shine? A random result of coalescing gases igniting nuclear fusion? Or is it in order to give its light and warmth to life? Why does the rain fall? Is it the senseless product of blind chemical processes of evaporation and condensation? Or is it to water life? Why do you seek to pour forth your song? Is it to show off your genetic fitness to attract a mate, or is it to contribute to a more beautiful world? We may fear those first answers, but it is the second ones that carry the ring of truth.

Every culture, as far as I know, has something that I call a Story of the World. That story is a weave of myths, meanings, narratives, words, symbols, rituals, and agreements that together define the world. That story tells us who we are, how to be a man or a woman, what is important and valuable, what is real, what is sacred, and what humanity's role and purpose is on earth.

The world's dominant culture, the one called modern, has a story of the world, too. I call it the Story of Separation. I won't go too deep into it now, because I bet you already know intuitively what I'm talking about. It is the story that holds us as separate individuals and holds humanity separate from nature.

In the Story of Separation, giving does not come naturally. In fact, that story says our default nature is selfishness, down to the genetic level. If I'm separate from you, then more for me is less for you.

In the Story of Separation, trust does not come naturally, either. The world is our adversary, full of other separate individuals, human and otherwise, whom we must compete with and overcome to have a good life—weeds, germs, the Russians, whatever. Beyond that, the forces of nature are adversaries too, because they are utterly random, and the whole universe tends toward entropy. There is no intelligence or purpose outside of ourselves. Therefore, to establish a comfortable human habitation in the world, we must dominate and control these forces, insulate ourselves from them, and harness them to our purposes. That's what the Story of Separation says.

Where in that story is there room for gratitude? Where is



there room for gift? In the Story of Separation you basically have to rise above human nature, rise above the way of the world, to be selfless, generous, or altruistic. Becoming a good person, then, involves a sort of conquest, a conquest of self. It is the same domination of nature, this time turned inward.

Now, I have to say, this story is quickly becoming obsolete. Even its scientific dimension, in genetics, physics, and biology, is crumbling. In complexity theory, we understand that order can emerge spontaneously out of chaos, without an external organizing force. In ecology, we understand that the well-being of one is inseparable from the well-being of all. So let me talk about gift, generosity, and gratitude from the perspective of another story, a new and ancient story I like to call Interbeing.

In the Story of Interbeing, life is a gift. The world and everything in it is a gift. We did not earn our lives. We did not earn the sun; it is not thanks to our hard efforts that it shines. We did not earn the ability of plants to grow. We did not earn water. We did not earn our conception nor our breath. Our hearts beat and our livers metabolize all on their own. Life is a gift.

What about all those things that did come to you through hard effort? You worked hard for your money perhaps, for your status, for your healthy body. Okay, but from where comes your capacity to work hard? From where comes your creativity, your strength, and your intelligence? Did you earn those too?

When we apprehend these basic truths, gratitude comes

naturally. Gratitude is the knowledge of having received, and the consequent desire to give in turn. It is primal. All beings, including human beings, have an unquenchable desire to pour forth their gifts. That is why if you are in a situation where your gifts are not valued, not received, or not useful, you will want to leave that situation, that job or relationship. No matter how much you are being paid, no matter how scared you are to leave the relationship, you're going to want to bust out and develop and express your capacity to give to the world in service of something you care about.

All beings are thus. That is why we should be living in a world of incredible abundance. The fact that modern society has constructed conditions of such pervasive scarcity is an impressive achievement! So much talent. Such a rich world. How is it that so many live in insecurity, anxiety, and deprivation? Not even the wealthy are exempt from the fear of it.

Nature is fundamentally abundant, even profligate. I am writing this at my brother's farm. The birds sing all day, pouring forth their song as a gift to the world. Sure, I know about attracting a mate and marking territory, but come on, do they have to sing that much to do that? It is as if they are bursting with the desire to give their song, just like you are. You were born for it. Whatever your song is, you were born for it. Do the wild black raspberries here have to taste that good to attract animals to eat them and poop out their seeds? And don't you have that urge too, to do it better than necessary for the grade, for the boss, for the market? Don't you yearn to make art of your work? Don't you have the urge within you to create something beautiful, to expand your capacities to their full potential and express them in service to something magnificent?

You are not alone. Imagine what the world would be if each person were liberated in this desire. Imagine what the world could be if we could sweep away the conditions that conspire to stunt and suppress our gifts. These conditions are political. They are economic. They are ideological, they are relational, they are psychological and spiritual. For civilization to transition into an age of the gift requires transformation on every level.

I've written extensively about the transition on an

economic level, but what about the personal, relational, and spiritual? We need to deprogram from the habits of separation and scarcity to reclaim the primal state of gift. I don't think that this happens through personal efforts, motivated by the desire to be a better person. It is something that happens to us. It happens, in other words, as a gift.

The transmission vector of that gift is community. Generosity, you may have noticed, is infectious. When you witness generosity, you receive the message, "It is safe to give. It is okay. I'll be okay." Sharing stories and practices of gratitude, of generosity—and of the challenges and setbacks in stepping more deeply into gift—we generate a normalizing field that counteracts social programming toward competition, selfishness, and scarcity.

I hope most of what I've written here seems obvious. My purpose here is to pluck an ancient chord of recognition. It is to invoke a memory, to activate a piece of knowledge long suppressed in the dominant culture but still alive somewhere in all of us. It is simply that life is a gift, the world is a gift, and the cosmos operates on the principles of gift. Please bathe in your intuitive resonance with this truth. Beneath the cynicism we know: It is all a gift. Gratitude is our native state. Generosity is its maturation. Thank you for keeping the thread of this knowledge alive.

—Charles Eisenstein

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