

Spiritual Generosity: The Art of Selfless Giving

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(DISCLAIMER: These notes are our best attempt to capture the essence of what was said at this class. There is always a degree of human error involved when taking notes and we have transcribed them to the best of our ability.)

Guruji referred to the Bible's New Testament verses as the greatest truths given to mankind: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself". (Luke 10:27)

These two commandments sum up the whole purpose of religion. If you sincerely love God you will do only what is based upon truth. Your love will not allow you to err against Him. Bring in the light, and darkness will vanish as though it had never been. Bring in love of God and the darkness of ignorance flies away. The science of yoga explains the truth behind the first commandment, and gives definite scientific techniques that enable the devotee to attain the divine communion necessary in order to love God so completely. Behind each part of these commandments is a deep metaphysical truth."

With the science of yoga, we use our attention to find God and seek God within. They work hand in hand, because we can't really separate them. Guruji lives in each one of us. That's the whole purpose: to see God in yourself and one another. There's an American who was born in India. He immigrated to the United States as a young man and became an author and professor at Rutgers University. He told me that when younger people asked, "Do you feel like an American or an Indian," he answered, "If I am in America I feel like an Indian. I did this because I wanted to bother people."

That, of course, is not a great purpose in life. He went on to explain that he had great struggles in his life. He was in and out of the hospital a lot. Growing up, he felt that there was a limited amount of happiness in the world. "I had to grab all I could," he said.

When he was in his thirties, he decided to make a change. A woman got into the elevator with him, and he asked the woman, how she was doing. When she proceeded to tell him, he thought to himself, "Mother of God, I have my own problems!"

The woman proceeded to tell him about her son who was a paranoid schizophrenic. "I have to put him in the hospital again" she explained.

He knew she had a lot of problems, but decided to ask her, "Do you want me to go to the hospital with you?" He then stated, "As soon as I asked this question, I pleaded to God for her to say, 'No.'"

The woman replied, "Yes."

The man then reported, "Automatically, I felt an enormous release, and a great space opened up around us. One of the easiest ways to change is to offer patience to ourselves. He was putting into practice a

law of God. This is what God expects of each one of us. Guru has given us so much in his lectures and writings, and his life itself is a walking, talking scripture.

Even though Master is an avatar, he comes back into a small body and goes through these human experiences in order to teach us.

He told us, "When I was very little and saw the other children playing with something, I always wanted it. I began to use my strong will to get it. When this resulted in fights with others, I thought maybe this can't continue. The best way might be to share. When I was a young child, mother would give us treats to share with others. I thought, 'If I like it, others will like it too. If I share with everyone, then I'll have nothing'.

Then my experience became, 'If I share with others, I'll enjoy it more.'" This is the cosmic law of being unselfish put into practice.

In another story, Master tells us, "In college, I got two pineapples and gave the bigger pineapple to a friend. A wonderful feeling rises in you when you are more concerned with others. Not only does he thank you, but God thanks you too. We can never be happy by trying to keep things for ourselves. "

Guruji said, "Infinity is our home. We are just sojourning awhile in the caravanserai of the body. The more we get away from 'me' and 'mine", the more we will feel joy. Service to others is the purpose of this world; to give and serve.

Lord Krishna told Arjuna, "'O Arjuna, the best type of yogi is he who feels for others, whether in grief or pleasure, even as he feels for himself."

Whenever we reach out and help an individual, we are helping our larger self. When we feel the afflictions of all beings we try to decrease their suffering and to increase their happiness.

Often it is through afflictions, tests and trials in life, that we are forced to think of other people. The Olympic swimmer, Michael Phelps, had 28 Olympic medals, 23 of them gold. He revealed that while going through these amazing experiences, he was also going through a deep, dark depression. On one occasion, during the Olympics, he locked himself in his room for two or three days. He decided that he needed to get help. After going through treatment for his depression, he decided to help other people by telling his own stories. He emphasized, "Those moments were light years better than the winning of any Olympic medal.

"Money and possessions cannot give us that. By reaching out to help another person, we're helping God in that form. Those experiences made me who I am today and helped me to grow as a person," he said.

Master tells us, "As your range of experience begins to increase, you begin to expand your consciousness. You are taking a step toward Christ Consciousness. It is not only a meditation. It's also about right activity."

There is a legend about King Arthur. When he was a young man, the old king had died. Around that time, he found a large rock with a sword in it. The hilt was sticking out of the rock. It was proclaimed that whoever could remove the sword would be king. Arthur was serving a knight who was fighting another knight. His sword broke. Arthur remembered the sword in the rock. He ran down to the stone and pulled the sword out of the stone for the knight to use. He was proclaimed king.

When we perform selfless acts, we're going deeper into Christ Consciousness.

Einstein wrote, "A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest--a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

The way to get out of this prison is through selfless service.

Daya Ma wanted to be a bhakti yogi. Master told her, "You have to be a karma yogi".

She combined those two to make a strong foundation for this work to go on throughout the world. It's a marvelous thing to speak of love. It's another thing to put it in service.

The Upanishads state: "The Wise man, who realizes all beings as not distinct from his own Self, and his own Self as the Self of all beings, does not, by virtue of that perception, hate anyone." (6th Mantra)

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"What delusion, what sorrow can there be for that wise man who realizes the unity of all existence by perceiving all beings as his own Self?" (7th Mantra, Isha Upanishad)

How do we these truths in our lives? Do I take the least and leave the best for other people? There's much joy in being unselfish.

There's much joy in being unselfish. Master taught us by example. He would say, "As you are so kind and loving toward me, be that kind and loving to all."

Last night, Brother Sevananda told a story about St. Therese de Lisieux. She was a powerful soul with a strong will. There was an elderly nun, Sister

St. Peter. She was an invalid who needed to be helped around and who was not easy to get along with. She needed help to go from the chapel the refectory.

This nun was very critical. She would ask over and over, "Where are you? I don't feel you. You're going too fast. Slow down." She was a very bitter lady, always criticizing St. Theresa.

One day after they had made it to the refectory, St. Theresa rolled up her sleeves and helped her to cut her bread.

Theresa wrote in her diary, "I bestowed on her my favorite smile at the end of my task, and I won her strongest confidence. "

She was guiding the elderly nun down the halls. There were harmonious strains of distant music. The hallway was well lighted. She turned to the invalid nun, and instead of sweet music, she heard her complaints.

She wrote in her diary, "The contrast thrilled me. Not for a thousand worldly delights would I barter those ten minutes spent in charity. "

Thérèse deliberately 'sought out the company of those nuns whose temperaments she found hardest to bear.' What merit was there in acting charitably toward people whom one loved naturally? Thérèse went out of her way to spend time with, and therefore to love, the people she found repellent. It was an effective means of achieving interior poverty.

If you recall, Jesus said, that if you did it to my least brother you did it to Me. The way to freedom is service to others. The way to happiness is meditation and being in tune with God.

A disciple was doing some work for guruji with a willing, devoted attitude and Master was please. Master said that egotism or selfishness in us is a test and a limited prison. We are not these bodies. We will labor for the heavenly Father or selfishly for ourselves. We need to get outside of ourselves and to realize God as the giver.

There was a young college man, Paul Elder. Just before Christmas, his brother presented him with a shiny new car. He told his friends about a little street urchin asking him about his car.

"Where did you get that car?"

He responded, "My brother gave it to me, and I didn't pay for it at all."

The little boy's response was, "I wish I could be a brother like that."

Paul asked him if he would like to take a ride in the car, and the child replied, "Yes". He asked if he could ride by his house and stop. Paul drove by the house and stopped. The little boy ran up the stairs. He came back down carrying his little brother, who was crippled with polio.

He said to his brother, "There she is Just like I told you upstairs. And some day, I'll get you one just like it , and you can see in all of the Christmas windows. "

Master said to make up your mind to be of service to others every day. This is how Ma became so loving and so humble. Do not ridicule an erring person. If you listen and observe you may be able to understand and help him. You have to look beneath the surface.

I like to watch the devotees come in to our services. I often think, "Master has drawn a diverse group of souls."

There was a lady who was sitting on her porch shelling lima beans and throwing out the ones that looked dried out. She looked inside of the ones she was going to toss and found perfect lima beans. So disregard the shells.

Goethe said, "Treat people as they ought to be and they will become that."

Every day when you leave your home, think, "Today I'm meeting some challenging conditions. People who talk too much, (listed other flaws not included in these notes.) And I won't be surprised or disturbed, because I can't believe in a world without them. "

Some people cause happiness wherever they go. The Talmud says, "Do not unto others that which is hateful to you. " Whenever you do something, there is karma.

Jimmy Hoffa, organizer and late president of the Teamsters Union said, "I do unto others what they do unto me, only worse".

Think about a group like this one at Convocation. Think of all of the volunteers, coordinators, and others planning this event. Why do people do this, work and serve this way? Because it brings us joy to serve one another.

This is a large spiritual family coming together to serve one another. I see God's love flowing through everything. Remember, to know spirit, you must become the spirit.

So break the boundary of spirit. Take the least.

There was a missionary in the far country visited a little café. She was opening a letter and a twenty dollar bill dropped out. She looked outside of the café and saw a shabbily dressed man. "He probably needs this more than I do," she thought. She wrote on the envelope, "Persevere", and dropped it at the man's feet. A little while later, she turned around when the man tapped her on the shoulder. He presented her with a roll of twenty dollar bills.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Lady, you won!" he shouted. "Persevere was 20:1."

Learning to really listen to people is so important. One of the greatest ways that we can treat other people is to be present and listen, not just with our ears but with our minds, hearts, and souls, to be there, to be totally available. But you have to be very sincere to be with other people, not to analyze, but to listen, to have empathy.

Someone said, "When I ask you to listen and you give me advice, you have to do something to solve my problems, you have failed me. Maybe that's why God I mute. He just listens and trusts you to work it out for yourself, and if you want to talk, He is there."

One of the best counselors was Brother Anandamoy. Very rarely would he give me advice. He would just listen. He gave me his full attention. I always felt valued and always felt loved.

Here is your homework. When you see people, give them your whole heart and soul to listen .

A mother asked her little girl why she was so late getting home.

“My little friend showed me that her doll broke.”

“So you stopped to help her fix her doll?” the mother asked.

“No, I stopped to hear her cry.”

Franklin Delano Roosevelt told Harry Truman that he doubted if people were listening to him when he greeted them. “So I put out my hand and said to the people leaving, ‘I murdered my grandmother this morning. ‘ Most people responded with, ‘Oh, how lovely!’ or, “Just continue with your great work.”

But one foreign diplomat who was listening, whispered to me, “I’m sure she had it coming to her.”

Guruji was so practical and so balanced. He advised that when you feel like being alone, be away from people for a time, “When I am with others, I mix with concentration and love. When I am alone, I’m alone with God.”

Mother Theresa said, “Let no one leave here without being better. The biggest disease is the feeling of being unwanted, of loneliness. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread, but many more who are dying for love. “

The idea of forgiveness is also critical. “Master said, “You must love people, but it is sometimes hard. I have loved my enemies, and I shall never be an enemy to anyone.”

Robert Byrnes, the poet once said, “I talk to so many people who hold onto grudges. It is good to forgive, but best to forget.” Jesus told us to forgive 70 times 70. He told us that if someone smites you, to turn the other cheek.

When Abraham Lincoln was a young lawyer he asked to be put on a certain case. The other lawyers ostracized him. One of them, Edwin Stanton, commented, “I don’t want this gawky ape around. “Mr. Lincoln was denied any role in the trial – and his counsel was literally ignored and denigrated by Stanton.

“Where did that long-armed creature come from and what can he expect to do in this case,” Stanton reportedly asked. Lincoln heard him say this.

But when his friends asked him about Stanton, he said , “I heard him, and he was brilliant.”

Many years passed, and Lincoln had become president of the United States. He picked Stanton for Secretary of War. One of his cabinet members said, “Don’t you know that he is your enemy?”

Lincoln replied, "He's brilliant, and he's the best one for the job.

When Lincoln was assassinated, at his deathbed, Stanton, now an admirer, commented, "Now he's one for the ages."

A nine year old boy got a bike for Christmas. That afternoon, he saw a man loading the bike into his car. He put up a sign, "To the person who stole my bike. You really hurt my feelings, but I am a Christian and I forgive you."

The next day, the bike was back in his driveway with a brand new paint job.

Daya Mata said, "God does forgive us our errors. The simplest course is to draw directly to God. The same God is in all of us."

We cannot talk about the spirit of generosity without talking about our guru. He has come back from omnipresence to shepherd us back to God.

He promised us,

"Oh, I will come again and again!

Crossing a million crags of suffering,

With bleeding feet, I will come

If need be, a trillion times

So long as I know One stray brother is left behind."

("God's Boatman")

He advised us to see God in the suffering of the mentally and spiritually distressed, and to love the unconscious God in the enemy by a touch of love.

The guru is among all men, the best of givers. His generosity knows no boundaries. Shankara told us that a philosopher can only turn a philosopher's stone into gold, not into a philosopher's stone. But a guru can turn us into one like him. He is drawing each one of us to this path.

Unselfishness is required for thinking of others. When we think of others, they think of us.

We'll end with Master's prayer on forgiveness from "Whispers from Eternity".

"Heavenly Father,

Inspire us with generosity.

Thy Being is an outpouring of bounty;

Let us, too, know the joy of giving.

Teach us to spend for others' necessities

as naturally as for our own.

Since we shudder at

even the thought of destitution for ourselves. "

In spirit

us with

generosity

may we sympathetically help those who in

actuality know the pangs of want.

Let us realize that to die rich,

Without having shared our treasures,

Is to die poor in Thine eyes;

And to die poor because of liberality

Is to die rich with Thy blessings.

Men selfishly blinded by opulence

Must experience poverty in this or a future earth-life,

Because in the abodes of the world's-abandoned

They saw Thee not.

In all experiences of Thy children

It is Thine omnipresent consciousness

That enjoys and suffers.

Thou didst bestow riches on Thyself

In the forms of the wealthy

As an intricate human test

To see how charitable

Thou wouldst be to Thyself

In the forms of the needy

The large-hearted man,

Receiving from Thee

Loving largess

And freely bestowing it on others,

Expands into the Universal Self.

Accepting daily Thine endless gifts,

May we praise Thee and thank Thee,

O Giver of All!"

Paramahansa Yogananda