

## Three Priceless Gifts

*No act of kindness however small is ever wasted. (Aesop)*

It is that time of year again when so many of us get into a frenzy buying gifts for people who certainly do not need them and often do not even want them. Now you may believe that you are pretty immune to rampant consumerism, but I am afraid that we are all at least subtly influenced by those ubiquitous Christmas adverts and by the collective mania that breaks out in December every year.

So in this message, I am going to describe three wonderful presents that you might consider giving to your friends and loved ones this festive season - and none of them will cost you a penny or increase your carbon footprint by one centimetre.

### The Gift of Forgiveness

This month, many of us are supposed to be looking forwards to family get-togethers during the festive season. However, the reality is that when families get together for any length of time, someone usually begins to get on someone else's nerves. Jokes about mothers-in-law are so common because many of us do find our own mother-in-law (or father/daughter/son-in-law) to be pretty annoying at times.

Now when I talk about giving a relative the gift of forgiveness, I am not talking about taking the moral high road and forgiving them despite the fact that you think that they are really mean, judgemental, self-centred, bossy or whatever. I am talking about a much more radical form of forgiveness in which you realise that nothing your relative says or does can really hurt you, unless you choose to hang onto your grievances against them for dear life and thus pollute your own system with dark, life destroying energy.

Real forgiveness is all about finding the strength and courage to let go of our grievances against others and even to see them as angels in disguise. I know that might seem like a huge stretch in some dysfunctional families, but after many years of absorbing some pretty radical, spiritual teachings, I now firmly believe that we are all kind and loving at our very core – yes, even your mother-in-law/daughter-in-law/son-in-law. It is just that some human beings have become so distorted and damaged for whatever reason that their loving core is totally undetectable because it is now buried under such a huge heap of egoic dung!

If you are unfortunate enough to have someone like that as a close relative, perhaps you could do your very best this month to see them as a 'reverse bodhisattva.' A reverse bodhisattva is a tongue-in-cheek Buddhist term for someone who assists you to transcend your suffering by pushing your buttons so much that you just have to find a way to rise above your extreme irritation with them.

When we come from this radical spiritual perspective on life, we can usually find the courage and compassion to forgive even our worst enemies. We do not necessarily forgive their words or deeds, but we can definitely do our best to still extend loving kindness or compassion to them.

### The Gift of Little Acts of Kindness

The Dalai Lama has said that his religion is kindness. Now we cannot be as incredibly kind and compassionate as this iconic spiritual leader, but we can certainly commit to performing little acts of kindness on a regular basis. Doing so not only spreads a little joy around our troubled world, but in my experience our kindness just has to boomerang back to us sooner or later. As this year's great Aldi Christmas ad says, 'For you to be happy, you need to be kind!'

I am sure you do not need me to tell you how to be kind and compassionate, because I know if you are reading this message, that is simply the sort of person you are. But just for fun, here are three easy ways to spread a little extra cheer throughout December:

\*Each time you are served in a shop, spend just a minute or so asking the assistant how they are and wishing them a lovely day.

\*Offer a good friend or loved one a brief, but relaxing shoulder or foot massage – and worry not a jot that you have no real idea what you are doing!!

\*Secretly place a posh chocolate mint on the pillow of a relative or friend staying in your house so that they feel as though they are a 5\* guest. (Sorry, this kindness might cost you a penny or too, but think how many chocolates will be left in the box for you!)

### The Gift of Compassionate Presence

Even those of us who are retired still seem to rush about in our modern, hyperactive world finding little time to just sit and listen to our nearest and dearest. Moreover, some of us (e.g. me!) may have developed the bad habit of trying to be helpful by jumping in when someone is upset with what we think is helpful advice. One of the many things I admire about the Mindfulness

Association tutors who lead meditations on Zoom is that they gently remind participants not to jump into try and fix anyone who talks about having a difficult time during a discussion after the sit.

I still have a long way to go, but I am now trying to become a compassionate, but mainly silent presence whenever someone is telling me about their difficulties in life. I know that this approach to helping others is so much kinder and more effective than any attempt on my part to tell someone what to think or do, which is really just a not so subtle form of egoic arrogance on my part - and who on earth benefits from getting advice from an arrogant ego?

So this December, I am going to do my best to give my friends and loved ones the gift of being with them in a totally non-judgemental, compassionate, quiet way. I know that I will fail to do this a lot of the time. So what? I still cannot think of a better practice this December than to build up my compassionate listening skills. You may well think of a different totally non-material present that you would love to give yourself and/or others this month. All I can say is: Go for it!!

Peggy Foster  
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