

## Gifts from the Heart

*Every time you smile at someone it is an action of love,  
a gift to that person, a beautiful thing. (Mother Teresa)*

Have you started, or maybe even finished, buying your Christmas presents this year? A good friend of mine buys presents for her children and grand-children at the beginning of November each year to try and avoid the awful annual Christmas rush.

Well I have to tell you that this year, Gloria and I have decided that we are not buying any gifts for our dearest friends. We are also asking them please, please not to send us any presents of any kind. We do not need or want any more material goodies. We do not even want fresh flowers or plants. Our house is already choc-a-bloc with 'stuff'. So this year, we would much rather give some money to charity instead of spending quite a bit of money on gifts none of us really want or enjoy that much.

Whether or not you are buying quite a few gifts this Christmas – and of course there is absolutely nothing wrong with doing this if it brings you and your family and friends real joy – maybe you would like to contemplate this month on how we can all give each other real, non-material gifts from the heart at any time of the year, but particularly at Christmas.

The first gift from the heart is the gift of really listening to our loved ones. So many adults these days are so glued to their mobiles 24/7 that they do not even listen when their dear child is trying to tell them something. When I see this on the tram for example, I just feel sad. Moreover when a loved one begins to tell us a tale of woe, many of us are far too quick to jump in with some 'helpful' advice of some kind. We thus respond to others' distress with our egoic thought system rather than our loving heart.

Listening to others from our heart rather than our thinking mind is a wonderfully helpful skill that can take a little effort to master. If someone is telling me about a particular challenge in their life, I still notice that I have an unhelpful urge to leap in and give them some 'wise' advice. But I now know without a doubt that giving someone any kind of unsolicited, egoic advice of any kind is rarely truly

helpful and quite often simply irritates the heck out of the person on the receiving end of it.

When someone is sharing their worries with you, whatever type of worries they might be, the most loving, compassionate and giving thing that you can do for them at that moment is to stay fully present as you listen to them with an open, compassionate heart without saying a word.

Whenever you are with anyone in distress, you can simply set your intention to wrap them in a warm comforting blanket of loving kindness and compassion and then gently focus on connecting to them heart to heart rather than ego to ego. Learning to listen to others like this is a wonderful gift to our whole troubled world that urgently needs to be bathed in the soothing energy of compassion.

The second gift from the heart you might like to give your friends and particularly your family members this festive season is the gift of forgiveness. We all love our family members, but at the same time, there is usually at least one relative who drives us quite nuts from time to time. When I was in my 20s for example, my adoptive father used to press my button so badly a lot of the time that I was always incredibly relieved when his Christmas visits to me came to an end. I was also quite horrid to him from time to time in a totally vain attempt to push him away – mean behaviour which I now terribly regret.

Now that I have totally forgiven my adoptive parents for any accidental emotional harm they caused me in my childhood and early adulthood, I feel so much love and gratitude toward them. I thus know from my own experience how much giving others the gift of genuine, unconditional forgiveness gladdens our own heart and soothes our own troubled mind.

So this December, why not treat yourself to the gift of forgiveness. Begin by choosing to let go of one grievance you may be holding against a family member or even against a politician or public figure of some kind. Then notice how good letting go of that angst feels. In my own long experience of being on a path of forgiveness, forgiving others can sometimes feel like a big stretch, but once we do it, we finally realise how much of a gift we are giving to ourselves as much as the person whom we are forgiving through letting go of the toxic energy of our resentment or grievance toward them.

The third gift from the heart that you might like to give this month is the gift of silently blessing everyone with whom you come into contact at a particular time of the week. For example, if you do a weekly shop at your local supermarket, you might choose to secretly and silently bless any members of staff you see in the store.

If you would like to add a little spice to this blessing practice, you can look carefully at someone and then guess what blessing might be most appropriate for them. For example, if you see someone smoking in your supermarket carpark, you can silently say to them: *I bless you with good health*. If the person serving you at the checkout looks a little down or weary, you can secretly bless them with radiant energy or inner joy. Sometimes when I play this blessing game, if I see a young man looking a little lost or lonely, I secretly say to him, 'I bless you with a wonderfully loving partner.'

So there you have it: three simple ways to send a gift of a little unconditional love out into our troubled world. According to Christian tradition, *Tis the season to be merry!* and I can think of no better way to get into the festive spirit this December than to share some heart-centred compassion, forgiveness and blessings with all those around us as the year speeds rapidly to a close.

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