

RECIPROCITY: RESPONDING TO WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN

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Here is a parable of *becoming*. It is a story of a young man who desires to fulfill the potential for his life that he feels inside himself. And yet it is the story of all people—every man and every woman of whatever age.

There was a young man just turning sixteen years old. He was becoming more and more aware of the world around him. He saw other men—most of whom were older than himself—who had what he wanted. He watched his favorite movie star win the heart of the leading lady, both on and off the screen. He listened to inspiring talks given by one of the most successful businessmen in the world. He attended a campaign speech of his favorite presidential candidate. He watched a teen pop music star being mobbed by his fans.

The young man desperately wanted what these men had. He wanted to be loved. He wanted to be rich. He wanted to be a powerful leader. He wanted to be famous. So he sought to become these things. He sought to show his young, male sexual attraction to the most attractive young woman in his school. Later, he got his MBA and began his own Internet startup. He ran for city council, and won. He promoted himself as a

public speaker and gave talks at large conferences around the country.

The young man had periods of amazing success at everything he did. At times, he was flying high! Drugs magnified his experience. But still, he ached inside and he didn't know why. He didn't understand why, after achieving all that he had, he felt so isolated and desperate.

By age 35, all his ambition had run its course. The woman he married had left him. His business failed, and in the process of trying to make it succeed, he lost almost all the money he had earned. After his drug use was reported widely on the Internet, he lost the last election and he was no longer able to book speaking engagements.

At his lowest point, he gave up his house to the bank. He found a job opening on an organic farm in New Zealand, and so took all his remaining money and travelled halfway around the world.

As he stood among the sheep on the green hillside of the farm, he looked out across the countryside. He reflected on his life and what it had come to. He thought of the kindness of

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the farmer and his wife, and the lowly but important role he was playing on the farm. Standing on the other side of the globe, he saw the beauty of the world as he never had before and realized that he was happy for the first time. He saw a new life opening up before him.

The process of becoming is based in the principle of reciprocity. Put most simply, reciprocity is how we respond to what we have been given. Our reciprocity changes us. *How* we respond determines *what* we become. When reciprocity works on a creative basis, we become on the outside the truth of who we are already on the inside.

There is a science to reciprocity. It is not the science of testing in a laboratory. It is a science that is based on how we are made and the laws that govern a human life. While, at the physical level, we can research how matter responds to the energies that come to it, for human experience the most meaningful testing we can do is in the laboratory of life.

The parable reveals a powerful factor in reciprocity—relative size. The young man saw around him other men who, at least in his eyes, were larger than he was—older, more mature, with greater stature as men and with greater stature in the world. He felt small relative to them, and wanted to become large, as he perceived them to be. We can probably think compassionately about any young man who has such thoughts and feelings. In so many ways, it is the most natural thing in the world to want what he wanted. So what went wrong?

I have asked myself this question as I have searched for reciprocity in my own process of becoming. I've also had the opportunity to observe how young men work with these issues, including young men who have come to Sunrise Ranch where I live, looking to spiritually awaken and grow. I observe that men struggle with these issues. But of course it isn't only men who do. Personally, I am more familiar with how these

issues constellate for me as a man. But while they manifest somewhat differently for women, the same issues are at stake.

This is what I have come to understand. For a young man to become the largeness of the person he is destined to become, he must find a creative way to embrace his smallness in relationship to what is larger than he is. That includes his relationship to elder men. He has to reject any dysfunctional way of relating to his own father, or to other authority figures in his life, so that he can find a way to be of service to something larger than himself on a creative basis. It certainly helps if he can find a way to be of service to elder men. That experience expands so that it includes his ability to serve God. There's a size differential! Ultimately, reciprocity has to include his service to the spark of the divine creativity within himself, and his service to the world around him.

The disruption in the process of becoming is perpetuated anytime a person who has greater stature, position and power betrays a relationship with someone who looks up to them. When that happens, they make it difficult for the person who might be looking up to them to know reciprocity. They perpetuate the belief that the way you become who you want to be is to be arrogant—to take, for yourself, what you want to have and to pretend to be what you believe you are not.

The young man has to come to the appreciation that he has been given something; from his father, from the Universe, from within himself. What is he going to do with it? How is he going to respond in his life? In the world as it is, there are so many factors that make it difficult for him. His own father can be harsh and abusive. Even worse, the father can ignore his son. The authority figures he meets—teachers, leaders and guides—can mislead him. Religion can misrepresent the Divine and shame his own soul. The issue for him is whether he can sort through all those factors to find the largeness of Being that has given him so much and to which he can respond. His

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reciprocation in this way leads him on his own path of becoming.

When there has been a disruption in this process, reciprocity is counterintuitive for a person. The young man sees the stature of men around him that he adulates. It may be a movie star; it may be a great leader like Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi, or it may be his own father. And it's so natural for that young man to want some of that for himself; some of that stature, some of that authority, some of that ability to lead. He may also desire for himself connection with other people, and the kind of magnetism that he sees in a popular public figure. He wants to be big. What he may not see is the goodness of accepting the seemingly humble experience of life that he is currently having. He may not see the value of being of service to what is larger than he is—to his teachers, parents and leaders; to the people around him and to God. He doesn't understand that he becomes big by accepting his smallness.

I have learned that truly great people have become great because they have accepted their own smallness relative to something much larger than they are, and they devoted themselves to be of service to that larger reality. They stay great because they continue to be of service. That may not be apparent to the young man. He may see the outer stature, position and power, and not the inner devoted heart. The men who are heroes to me are that because their devoted heart led them to be great. Through his oratory and his organizing, Martin Luther King awakened a generation of people to a new vision for America. Behind that leadership was his compassion for the people of America and his service to his God. John Lennon was a brilliant songwriter and performer with a tough-guy exterior earned through his upbringing in Liverpool. In back of that was a heart longing for love, and a vision of a new world that came out in his inspiring anthem *Imagine*.

There was a man who was very important in my life who I knew more closely. His name was

Martin Cecil. He was a spiritual leader who taught and led with an enlightened vision, authority and power. To some, he seemed austere and his words seemed hard. They saw the strength and the authority of his words, they saw his leadership, but there were parts of him that they didn't see and didn't understand.

It was amazing for me and many others to be with him. For those with eyes to see it, there was an open heart and mind that sometimes showed itself in a particular way when he offered a spoken prayer. You could catch a glimpse, not only of the power of his expression with his face turned towards his world but also of the man's inner heart and his passion and devotion for what he served. The more I came to understand him, the more I came to understand that his devotion wasn't only in his spoken prayers but in all his words and throughout his life. Behind his power and strength, and the strength of his stature, there was unbelievable passion. I have heard people say at times they thought he was a dry speaker and I thought, "Were you in the same room, listening to the same person?" Because I could feel his inner courage, his inner passion, his utmost commitment in service. And the power of that came roaring through what he brought to the world, and became so inspiring. His own demonstration of reciprocity was a teaching for anyone who had eyes to see.

In every aspect of our life, there is the opportunity for reciprocity. Regarding every virtue that you can imagine for a human being to embody, every creative experience that you could want for yourself, everything that a person might become, it all comes through the process of reciprocity.

Reciprocity begins with a polar opposite of the positive virtue to which a person may aspire. So if you want to be a great leader, be a great follower. If you want to bring positive magnetism to your world, so that there are people who follow what you are teaching or saying, then respond to the positive magnetism that others bring to your life.

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Find that responsive aspect of yourself that will gravitate toward what you love, whether it's in another person, in the world, or just experiences in your own life or in a book. Gravitate to that, respond to it, and you will become it.

If you are looking for people to respond in love to you, find a way to allow the depth of your own responsive love to go to other people. If you desire to bring direction to other people and are wondering why people aren't following the direction that you're giving them when you think that they should, practice taking direction yourself. Check for yourself: Do you take direction? And how thoroughly? And when do you stop? When do you say no? What are your barriers?

Do you want to experience brilliant thinking? How about receiving the brilliant thinking of another person? Study with them, read their books, follow their thinking, entrain with it, allowing your own thinking to be stimulated by them. Many people leave school and they find no further opportunity to let their thinking be stimulated in brilliant ways by brilliant thinkers.

We have names for what happens when reciprocity isn't followed. For men, broken reciprocity may show itself as the Peter Pan Syndrome. *I won't grow up*. This is a man who never comes into the fullness of his strength and capacity and intelligence, or the leadership that he is meant to embody in the world, because something has gotten stuck. He may have settled for the booby prize, which is to challenge Dad or some other authority figure. Challenging authority can be part of the developing process. But if that is as far as it goes as an ultimate act of reciprocity, it's the booby prize. Of course, "Dad" can be replaced by the government or by a corporation or a leader.

Real reciprocity is receiving what you have to receive from the world around you and the people around you, and receiving it in humility. So if there's something stuck in your life, check. Maybe

there is some reciprocity that you have been unwilling to give back to life itself. Perhaps there is something yet unfulfilled that is keeping you from becoming all of who you're meant to be in your life.

Another word we have for a relationship in which reciprocity is not moving in the fluid and dynamic way that it should is *codependence*. A codependent relationship is one where there is some kind of inability or dysfunction on the part of one person that's being continually enabled on the part of another. That's service to another person gone wrong. There's a *lack* of reciprocity, because in real service that person who is being served is changing. They're getting off the dime. They're moving. They're not just sucking off the energy of the other person. They're receiving the leadership and then they're doing something with it. The young man isn't just staying home forever and sucking off Mom and Dad. Yes, there's a time when it's right to receive that nourishment, but if there is reciprocity, when we are nourished and supported we have nourishment and support to give. Without reciprocity, a person is stuck in some kind of infantilism, which is another word that we use for what happens when reciprocity breaks down.

If you are interested in deepening your own reciprocity, here are some good questions to ask:

- *Where am I unwilling to reciprocate?*
- *Where won't I humble myself?*
- *Where won't I learn?*
- *Where won't I respond?*
- *Where won't I serve another person and meet their needs?*

These issues are relevant to anyone's individual experience. They are also issues for humanity as a whole. Humanity is meant to reciprocate to the reality of God, not pretending that we haven't received. We *have* received, from both the Creator and the Creation. And maybe there's more to receive, so we need to be open to receive

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that more. We need to be open to receive all that comes to us out of the Invisible, all the love and all the truth. It's being given. The first step is to hear it, to receive it, to be open to it. You can't be open to it in arrogance.

Arrogance is another word for reciprocity broken down. This is the young man in the parable, trying to be big, trying to be important without the actual experience of what truly makes a person important. That is the problem for humanity. Humanity senses that it should be God on this planet. Right now, we are being a pretty bad God. We are creating global warming and pollution, decimation of species—we're being God, but we're not being a very good God. The way we're reciprocating isn't working. And why? It is well-named as arrogance. We want to skip the step of receiving the love and truth that comes from the Invisible and go right to being king of the world. There is nothing wrong with bringing authority into the world, except that humanity has done it

in a way that has short-circuited the process of becoming, so that humanity hasn't become God. It has become an arrogant tyrant. Humanity hasn't humbled itself to truly learn from God what it would mean to be God on this planet, and *how* to be God.

We are supposed to be God with each other, but that's probably a frightful thought. We say that in a derogatory way: "He thinks he's God." By which we mean that a person is arrogant: trying to have authority without having earned it through reciprocity, through the process of becoming. We *become* the true God for other people and for the world when we *receive* God from other people and from the world, and then respond in kind. When you fully receive what you are being given with the gratitude that it deserves, you are called into the creative process by which you become fully in living expression the reality that you already are.

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