

From Obligation To Giving From The Heart

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You value generosity and you often give easily from the heart. There are those times, however, when you get snagged by a sense of obligation. You feel tense and resentful. You don't want to continue with this attitude, but you can't find your way out. How can you reconnect with the desire to give from the heart?

Let's touch on three essential elements that support giving from the heart: choice, mourning, and acceptance.

Choice

When you have a sense of confidence in your ability to make a choice, you can give authentically. You know and trust your boundaries. You know the difference between giving to win acceptance or love and giving because you enjoy being in the flow of life.

Confidence with choice can become blocked when it is used as a strategy to establish identity. When identity becomes linked with particular choices, it can result in tragic strategies to pursue money, status, material possessions, rules, or ideologies at the cost of other's needs. Any time you choose to identify with a strategy— that is, decide that who you are can be found in a thing, a rule, or a view— you create barriers that make choice difficult to access, which sets you up for obligation and resentment.

Here are two ways to examine how you might be organizing your experience of choice and what changes might help you access authentic generosity.

1. In a journal or in the company of someone you trust, answer the question, "Who are you?" Answer quickly without thinking about it. Answer continuously for a full minute. Then review your answer without judgment. Notice what you have unconsciously or consciously identified with. Which of these identifications give you a sense of agency and movement, and which bog you down? How might you begin to change what you identify with in a way that is life-serving?
2. Next, ask yourself what you would like your choices to be aligned with relative to giving or offering service? What values are consistent among the ever changing flow of feelings, thoughts, and, needs? In other words, to what do you most deeply want to dedicate your life energy? Is your life primarily about kindness, love, compassion, wisdom, service, inclusion, fairness, or acceptance? Or something else? As you become inspired to engage in something larger than yourself, you will find that choice lives more and more with a true sense of freedom and generosity.

Mourning And Acceptance

Mourning and acceptance are best friends, and they open the way for their other friends; joy, compassion, and wise action. The moment you push past a feeling, need, dream, or any experience in favor of getting to the next thing, you build up a bit of sludge in your body and energy. Your experiences become clogged around this blockage, and it becomes dense as they pile up there.

Experience is meant to flow, change, and evolve. Recall a moment of watching a mountain stream. You notice how the water finds its way again and again around stones, branches, and leaves. Experience is meant to flow like water, brimming with vitality.

Mourning and acceptance keep your inner stream of experience flowing. In daily life this might look like a moment of breathing in and noticing your experience, and breathing out as you relax your body. For example, reading a disturbing news event, you might pause in the middle to breathe in while remembering that it's okay to feel sad, and to breathe out while relaxing your body. Or, perhaps you look out the window at work and feel the call to be in nature. Breathing in, you allow the longing and the grief about not being outside in that moment, and breathing out you relax your body.

Consistently turning your attention to what you are most deeply dedicated to, and meeting each moment with mourning and acceptance, allows the flow of life to go where it naturally wants to go... to joy, love, and generosity.

Practice

Take a moment now to rest your attention on that to which you are most deeply dedicated for one full inhale and one full exhale.