

The User Friendly Heart

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Gift giving and philanthropy is a mix of social expectation, personal choice and tradition. They are gestures of fellow feeling. In giving, what kind of a gift is the highest of all? In what manner may it be given? And in choosing a gift, in whose advice may we unconditionally trust?

The season of goodwill and gifts is here. Diwali went by, up ahead is Thanksgiving, Milad un-Nabi, Christmas, Hanukkah and the New Year. Festive occasions for families and friends to bond and to exchange gifts in demonstration of mutual love, respect and gratitude. Quite a lot of planning goes into gift giving: whom to give what, based on their age, status, likes and dislikes, and so on.

What is the highest gift that one person can give another?

The question pits the principles of parsimony and bounty against each other. Both are bound in a logic that calculates how much of your hard-won earnings, your time, even your advice, you may give to family, friends and strangers.



Giving is easier when the recipient is a family member or a friend. We love our families, our friends we cherish, and we give to them without as much as a second thought, spontaneously. When the recipient is a stranger, however, the cold logic of cost versus benefit shuts the open heart.

At the core of a gift is the purity of intention, which doesn't factor in what is gained in giving, and the capability of the giver, transforming even the smallest of gifts into an esteemed treasure.

Religious traditions speak of the highest of gifts: Grace.

Grace is neither deserved, nor merited, nor earned. Grace is the divine's free favour, the benevolence that divinity chooses to bestow, simply because divinity elects to.

Is such a pure gift possible between humans? I believe so.

The Art of Giving

Almost all religious traditions encourage giving: charity, zakat, alms, daan. The giving, whether optional, essential or compulsory, is embedded in the ritual of worship, such as in offerings to the divine or in philanthropy in God's name.

Yet is a gift motivated by a belief in the existence of a benevolent god or aimed at a god's pleasure the highest simply because it implicates the divine?

Almost all lay traditions also highly regard any effort that strives to uphold dignity and ease a fellow being's life of hard knocks. Examples include the setting up of a school fund for a dispossessed child, and the feeding of refugees who lack protective shelter. Such gifts seek to restore humanity and this is sufficient in itself to earn the label of a noble gift.

In that sense, a gift is one that is precious to the giver and enriches the recipient's situation; however, this may still involve the giver's ego and oblige the recipient to respond with a gift of his own, in deed or word or thought.

What then is the highest gift that one person can give another because it is neither the divine nor the tax collector who will cut us a seasonal break?

Tough question! What might the heart say?

The Heart's Bias

The heart is not simply a cardiological pump. Most traditions – secular, spiritual, atheist, literary or medical – admit to the heart's starring role in an individual's existence. Still we don't consult the heart or take time to examine whether it is really the heart's message that we hear.

The heart's intrinsic nature is goodness, and to allow this goodness to manifest in us is both simple and easy when we have a [method](#) to heed the heart's guidance.

The heart alone, perceived clearly in the stillness of the mind, can advise on a suitable gift because the heart is biased towards what is good for you as well as others. It is biased towards a gift that places no burden on the giver's ego and no obligation on the recipient, even as it fulfils a dire need.

The heart will advise on a suitable gift and inform a manner in which a gift is given.

No external algorithm can find the answer relevant to you. On the other hand, your heart can and is seeking to be heard.

If you sit comfortably, close your eyes and thaw into your heart's embrace, experiencing the heartfelt states of silence, love, of a promising, emergent guidance, you will discover *your* highest approach to giving, including what to give.

Only by consulting the heart is a pure gift possible between humans.

Settling a Bit Inward

Galileo did not invent the telescope but he was the first to turn it to the sky and chart a new world. Heeding the heart's guidance is like turning the telescope and settling our sustained attention inward.

In abiding only by habitual conventions and social routines, we risk a false understanding that "I don't have within me the guidance necessary to live a full life".

How about balancing the external conventions with a path that dedicates a bit of daily quiet time to your own heart?

Heartfulness is heeding the message of the heart. You are pre-endowed with the heart's wisdom and no one can offer that to you. The only magic wand is your *interest* to fortify the connection with your heart, which is user friendly and has the [answer](#) to every life situation, well past what gift to give this festive season.

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