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Conversations with self-30

Learning to receive with grace

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We are taught as young children to be great givers, yet we have never learnt to receive with thankfulness.

A middle-aged widower with a young daughter hired a governess to look after his child. In his house also lived his young energetic secretary, who wanted to serve his boss well. Yet every time he asked his boss if he needed help, the boss would turn around and give him a gift as though urgently needing to repay a debt. This went on for several months till one day the young secretary came to his boss and said he wanted to marry the governess. The boss flew into a rage and called the young man selfish. He said angrily, "I have given you so much and you want to marry the governess whom I am in love with?" The young man remorsefully said, "Sir, I have always asked you what I can do for you but you have refused to take anything from me. Today I decided to take something for myself and you do not like it." The boss realised that he had been selfishly refusing a gift from his assistant, believing that he never wanted to be in debt.

We are taught as young children to be great givers, yet we have never learnt to receive with thankfulness. When somebody asks us if we want something and we are quick to deny their request, we are actually taking away a gift from them. When we refuse gifts from people we are cheating them of an opportunity to express their love for us. In assuming we are selfless and not wanting to impose on them, we actually shut the door of love on their face.

Just as it is important to give with grace, it is also important to receive with grace. When we receive, we put out our hand and this brings a natural humility to our bearing. It is only when we receive that we will be in a position to give; for when the palm is full with gifts received there is an opportunity to share. When we receive, there is fullness in our being, and we can also give with magnanimity. Thus receiving with grace is as important if not more than giving.

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