

The Visible/Invisible Power of Generosity
A Joint Sermon by the Revs. Robert and Makanah Morriss
April 17, 2005

Makanah:

Generosity is an invisible act of empowerment – for both the giver and the one who receives.

Can you remember a time when someone – a family member, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, a stranger – acted in a generous and giving way toward you and in so doing strengthened or even re-kindled your sense of hope and possibility? It might have been a gift, or monetary support, or words of affirmation and encouragement, or an act they did with you or for you. It may have been something big, or it may have been something small but something that touched you profoundly.

For myself, one such act of generosity that comes to my mind and heart was one evening in June 1993 at the UUA General Assembly. My mother was seriously ill in a hospital in Connecticut. I had been with her right before leaving for GA and we had hoped that I could make the trip to GA as at the time I was Director of the Religious Education Department at the UUA and General Assembly was one of my critical work times each year. I arrived in Asheville, N.C. but after only a few hours got a call that I needed to return to Connecticut. We did not think that mother had long to live.

I needed to go to the Opening Ceremonies before flying to Connecticut the next morning. All the UUA staff were required to sit together in a specific section of the convention hall. My heart was heavy and it felt very challenging to be my “professional self” that evening. As I sat down, one of the members of my staff, Jory Agate, our youth programs director who was closer to my son’s age than my age, sat down next to me. She knew what was happening and gently put her arm around me. She quietly and profoundly let me know that the loving energy I needed at that moment was very available – that I was loved and supported and cared for. We sat like that through the opening session. Jory helped me get through that evening and I will forever remember her generosity in lending me her strength.

Generosity is, I believe, a special form of energy -- at times both visible and invisible.

The generosity of Terry Kreuzer and Eve Withrow who gave of their creative and artistic time and talents to create the mandalas on the silk hangings in this room is both visible in its concrete form and invisible in the way these images may touch and inspire our souls. Many times, newcomers have walked into this Meeting Room, looked at the mandalas and experienced, “I have come home. I can belong here.”

The generosity of Terry and Eve’s creativity carries with it an energy that is available every time someone looks at the hangings. Generosity is a very special kind of energy.

Caroline Myss, author and holistic teacher, in a fascinating new book entitled *Invisible Acts of*

Power, writes:

“I believe that the human spirit needs to develop generosity and compassion to be healthy. We need to respond to other’s vulnerabilities in the process of addressing and healing our own. Exercising empathy and compassion and performing good deeds makes our body and spirit thrive. One scientific study has actually shown that we require at least four hours a month of face-to-face volunteering time for good health...” (Myss, p.7)

She goes on, “The warm glow we get from helping others is not just a good physical feeling – it is the energy of a healing grace that moves between the giver and the receiver and blesses both. We need each other. We’re not meant to be completely independent, but to give and receive...The journey of the ‘self’ also involves the journey of the ‘other’.” (Myss, p.7)

We know that nature or the Great Mystery has given us brains that are evolving in ways that are increasing our capability for empathy, courage, and generous action. The pre-frontal lobes of our brain, the newest part to evolve, and a part which some of us certainly hope we are continuing to evolve (!) is designed to enhance these functions.

Being of service, offering help matters. As we reach out to others, as we receive their help, we feel the cosmic connections of the interdependent web of all existence. When we buy Fair Trade Coffee from the cart that Carole Bowles coordinates for us, when we read her articles in the FOCUS about the stories of the people who grow this coffee, we feel better about our selves and our world. Our morning cup of coffee is actually reaching out and helping the world to work in eco-sustainable ways. Wow, we actually do make a difference – and by drinking coffee, tea, or hot chocolate – who would have thought?

Carolyn Myss offers a very interesting presentation on the ways in which each of our seven chakras or energy centers in the body has its own ways of encouraging generosity. The chakra system is an ancient understanding of how we function as human beings based in Eastern thought. We know we are made up of energy in different forms – atoms and molecules, cells and organs, limbs, muscles, etc. The chakras are energy centers within our body which, when able to work in harmony with our physical anatomy, keep us healthy and functioning. “The chakras connect us to the greater energy field of life and the universe. Our intuition tunes in to the different frequencies of each energy center and frequently alerts us with a feeling or gut instinct that something is wrong, or that our mind, body, and spirit are out of balance.” (Myss p.19)

Many holistic health approaches utilize these subtle energy aspects of our bodies in their work to encourage health and healing. One image of these centers is that each is 3-5” in diameter and can be imagined as round or disc-like in shape.

The first chakra, at the base of our spine, is experienced as being the anchor that connects us and our spirit to our physical life and the physical world. Its gifts are the gifts of connection to the earth, connection with our family (biological or chosen) or our “tribe” or community. Food, shelter and the basic necessities of life are its concern. And when we see someone without food or shelter,

our desire to help comes in part from this chakra.

The second chakra, located below your waist, offers gifts of survival, financial and creative support. Its energy is rugged, determined, resilient, survival oriented, sexual, and creative. Its energetic ingredients help us meet and master all kinds of life challenges. It also involves the energy of money, of making money, and working with money and sharing money. And it is the seat of our creative energy – motivating us to become part of society, to be productive, to care for the next generation, to encourage healthy communities. (Myss, p. 13-14) When our creative energies are blocked, our physical health eventually is diminished. Being in a community that encourages creativity, like our religious community, is essential to our health!

The third chakra, located in the area of our solar plexus, brings gifts of self-esteem – unconditional Support, Friendship and Personal Dignity. Its energy infuses us with the sense of “what I am” and according to some Eastern philosophies is the seat of personal strength, healthy psychological boundaries and self-sufficiency. This is also where we generate the ability to make decisions for ourselves, to handle crises, and take risks. In many ways, this chakra is the most influential over our ability to create a happy, satisfying life for ourselves and to empower others to do the same. (Myss, p. 25)

People who feel good about themselves experience the world as a beneficent place – or at least not a totally threatening and frightening place. They have a sense of inner security which money cannot buy.

A caring, supportive, and encouraging community can generously offer us courage as we clear away blocks to our sense of self-esteem. Generosity from this chakra comes in the form of affirmation, a helping hand which assists us as we do what we are needing to do, a listening ear as we tell our story.

Bob:

The fourth chakra is located in our heart area. It offers the gifts of the heart, kindness, love, forgiveness, and compassion. It is aligned with our emotional life and is the center of our emotional well-being. This energy helps us answer the existential question, “Whom shall I love and how shall I love?” Myss claims that acts of kindness, love, forgiveness, and compassion given and received can do more in five minutes to heal or nurture someone than ten thousand dollars’ worth of therapy spread over a year if the therapy is focused solely on the self. (Myss, p.26)

Our congregation’s heart generosity is amazing. Every day Makaanah and I are touched and inspired as we hear about our UCC members and friends reaching out to one another, offering a visit, a ride, or some form of support to those in our religious community or in the wider community.

We encourage such energy in our children and youth by building social action projects, projects of hands-on compassion, into their RE programming as one of the crucial components of understanding what religion is about. All over Cheyenne, our congregation is known as one that truly

“walks its talk.” Our clergy colleagues do not always agree with us theologically, but they deeply admire the openness and commitment of our congregation to make a difference.

The fifth chakra is located in the throat center and offers the gifts of will, of courage, and guidance. This chakra’s energy addresses the question, “What will I do?” This is the center of choices and consequences. This chakra mediates between the head and the heart and helps us keep our word and fulfill our promises.

Our covenant, our promises to each other, which we share at the beginning of each Sunday Service, speaks to this. We promise to live together in peace, to seek truth and to help others. This is what we do. And together we offer generosity in listening, sharing ideas, and belief in the possibility for each of us to make a difference. We are very willing to be that “rocket booster” for someone, to have faith in them, to catalyze her or his transformation. We are a religious people who are open to change and transformation – not needing to hold life or ideas or answers in rigid and limiting ways. A model of generosity here is our willingness to support each person on their individual spiritual path, rather than insisting on their joining us on one with which we have become comfortable.

The sixth chakra, located at the center of the forehead, offers the energy gifts of rational thought, wisdom and optimism. As Caroline Myss writes, “It is impossible to be both wise and pessimistic.” Our Unitarian Universalism is a path of practical optimism – realizing that there are many difficult challenges and unknowns - but also believing in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and that when we become conscious of the consequences of our actions we will choose to do what is right. Our Universalist heritage is a root that gives people hope – hope for themselves, their future, the future of our global village, and for planet Earth. Our classes, programs, projects offer an honoring of the rational and wise mind, the optimistic and creative soul.

The seventh chakra, located at the top of the head, is experienced in Eastern traditions to be the center of “higher consciousness” – bringing to us the energy of vision, mystery, and the call to compassionate action. Seventh-chakra energy enables us to allow our sense of “spirituality” or profound universal connection to become an integral part of our physical lives. It is a center that calls us to live a life congruent with our highest values and visions. In our liberal religious/philosophical tradition, this means that we encourage and learn from the different perspectives and beliefs we are each working on. We support our individual search for greater truth by walking together in community realizing the gifts and strength that come from diversity.

Generosity on the level of the seventh chakra is the energy that empowers us to become who we are, a people dedicated to celebrating the incarnation of spirit in all its diverse forms. Generosity, visible and invisible, shapes the quality of our lives and most definitely helps our congregation be the wonderfully healthy, creative, fun, profound and compassionate place that it is.

As I reflect on how the energy of generosity is expressed through each of the seven chakras I think of this community as truly blessed. This generosity makes the “magic that is us.” Whether it’s the activity of a Sunday morning, or the projects and meetings that take place during the week, we are

sustained by an energy and enthusiasm that creates a quality of community which may well appear to be magical in its ability to have things happen when they really need to be done.

And I also know that in our congregation, the magic is really in us. It is our energy that creates an inspiring RE program, a well-kept building, beautiful gardens, and our diverse outreach programs. And it is our energy in the form of money that keeps it all running.

Most of you know this, and it is still worth repeating; as a liberal church, we are sustained entirely by the energy and money that our members and friends contribute. We do very well in maintaining our programs with most forms of energy. And as for money, well, it is really merely a concrete form of energy – a form that - when share it with UUCC - helps to keep the lights and heat on, the physical plant running and in shape. Money is the energy which provides for professional staff – September, Andrea, Sharon, Makaanah and myself, all of whom are here to help YOUR visions and dreams and ideas become reality. Money also provides the resources for the programs and projects of our many committees, teams and activities.

Once a year we ask our UUCC members and friends to reflect on the meaning of this community to them and then to pledge their energy for the ongoing life of our congregation. We ask that you reflect on what is possible for you – perhaps this year you can stretch a bit further with fiscal giving or perhaps this is a year in which you need your enhanced giving to be in the form of the volunteer energy you have for our events and programs. Our budget this year is optimistic – created out of the vision you all shared in early March.

The canvass committee was inspired by the vision of congregational activity that was created by those who answered the survey. They were inspired as they listed all the things people said they wanted to see happening around here, and they began to perspire a little when they saw how much money we would need to raise to make it all happen. They did some careful analysis and came up with some really great news and some challenging news. The really great news is that there is enough money in this congregation to fully fund all aspects of this inspiring budget. The challenging news is that we haven't pledged it yet.

Given that fact, I am delighted to be able to turn the mike over to Rhonda Woodard, co-chair of our Canvass who will introduce a special presentation.