

# GIVING IS RECEIVING

Dr. Gururaj Karajagi,  
Chairman,  
Academy for Creative Teaching, R.T.Nagar, Bangalore -  
560032.

Few years ago when I was teaching Chemistry to the college students, I asked them abruptly in my class as to how many of them remembered the name of their grandfather. They appeared quite surprised. They perhaps could not find the relevance of grandfather in the midst of a Chemistry class. Nevertheless they all responded cheerfully by raising their hands. Then I continued with another question, "How many of you remember the name of your great grandfather?" They quizzically looked at each other but only a few hands went up. I smiled and continued with another question, "Now tell me how many of you remember the name of your great great grandfather?" This was becoming more interesting for them. They looked more surprised and curious not knowing where I was heading. I was shocked to see that not a single hand went up.

"I am truly surprised that none of you remember the name of your grandfather's grandfather. Why is that?"

After a little pause, a girl stood up and answered little rudely but I thought there was truth in what she said. She said, "Not worth remembering Sir." There was a burst of laughter in the class. She continued, "I do not think he did something great for me to remember." Another bout of laughter followed.

"That is fine dear. Hundred years from now your great great granddaughter would be sitting in the class and a teacher like me would ask her whether she remembers the name of her great great grandmother and if she answers 'not worth remembering' how do you feel?"

She looked distinctly puzzled. Then I said, "It is all right. Now, I would like to ask you one more question. I shall mention some names and I want you to tell me whether you remember these names."

They all excitedly shouted in chorus, "Yes Sir."

I said, "Listen carefully. Do you know the name of Shri Rama, the great king of Ayodhya?"

"Yes Sir." was the resounding reply.

"Do you remember Lord Krishna, Buddha, Mahaveera, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sankaracharya?" I asked.

For every name that I mentioned everyone in the class raised the hand and also shouted an emphatic, "Yes Sir."

Then I told them, "I have a problem here. You are not the great great grandchild of any one of the persons I mentioned just now but remember all their names. Unfortunately you do not remember the name of your own great great grandfather. Why is that? Can you ponder over this and tell me the answer?"

I paused for their reflection and contemplation.

Suddenly I saw a student on the third desk to my left wiping tears from her eyes. She was an extremely talented and sensitive student. I was concerned.

"What happened dear? Are you O.K.?" I enquired.

"I am O.K. Sir. But today, I learnt a lesson of my life Sir."

"A lesson of your life? What is that?" I asked curiously.

"Sir, The question you asked just now has shaken me. I realized its meaning. I learnt now that ***anyone who lives for himself shall not be remembered by the world and anyone who lives for others shall not be forgotten by the world.*** That is why we remember the names of all

those outstanding people who lived for others and do not remember those who lived for themselves even if they happen to be from our own family.

What a fascinating lesson that I learnt from this child!

Any act that I do for myself will take me to mortality and any small action that I do for others would take me to immortality.

There is tremendous joy in giving and not in just receiving. When you are giving something, you are receiving in multiple folds.

Truly, giving is receiving.

In fact, success of a life is measured by what you give rather than what you receive.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson puts it beautifully, "To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived; **this is to have succeeded.**"

This is just not a matter of emotional assumption. Even scientific studies seem to agree on this aspect. "You give from the heart and... it satisfies your brain," says Jordan Grafman, chief of the Cognitive Neuroscience Section at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. October 17, 2006)

Grafman and his team study aspects of the human brain that set us apart from other species, with the aim of using that knowledge to better test when things go wrong in our brains, and whether new treatments are effective. They decided to study which areas of the human brain are involved in donating to organizations "because we know that that's something that other species just don't do," he says.

They used a technique called *functional MRI*. It reveals which brain structures are most active relative to the rest of the brain when people perform certain mental tasks.

They reported that donating to charities lit up the brain's reward circuits even more than receiving cash.

*"The same regions of the brain that are associated with the reward and the good feeling you have when you get something yourself, like money, were the same areas that were activated when you give. That surprised us," says Grafman. "And not only were the same areas involved, but in fact they were more activated when you give than when you receive."*

And giving also excited areas of the brain that are not activated by receiving. One produces the so-called "cuddle hormone" oxytocin. "It's very well known that oxytocin is released when people feel an attachment," Grafman says.

Many years have passed since the deaths of Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Princess Diana. Yet, their lives remain clear in our memory. And for good reason, for there is much we can learn from them. For example, their deaths remind us how a person is remembered.

How do we remember the dead?

Not, "How did they die?"

But, "How did they live?"

Not, "What did they gain?"

But, "What did they give?"

History does not judge them by the number of servants they had, but by the number of people they served. Why did Princess Diana embrace an AIDS victim and Mother Teresa comfort a dying child and a leprosy patient? Isn't it because they understood that it is far better to wipe a single tear than to shed a thousand? They realized it is actions, not words that count.

We can learn from them and experience the joy of giving. To do so, we need not be as heroic. There is no need to travel to some distant land or search out the less fortunate. All we need do is awaken, to become

aware of those around us. Every encounter is an opportunity to give. Our siblings, spouse, children, friends, relatives, co-workers, boss, customers, and all those we meet will gratefully accept our gifts. The gifts I am referring to are spiritual in nature and, therefore, do not have any costs.

Sometimes we forget how much we have to offer. For example, though tired of waiting in line at the bank, we can offer the stressed-out bank teller a warm smile and the gifts of patience and understanding. We have the power to uplift her spirit and make her day! At home or in the office, our words of encouragement can plant the seeds of confidence in the minds of our children and co-workers.

There are many more gifts that we can give. For instance the gift of interest. What do you imagine is the worst thing we can do to someone? It is not to hate them, but to be indifferent toward them, to display no interest. If someone were to hate you, it may be because of envy. Hatred, then, is an expression of interest. Imagine what it would be like if no one had the slightest interest in you. That would hurt! Our gift of interest can help satisfy the craving for attention. Ironically, it is only after we express our interest in others that we can learn how interesting they are!

Still another gift is that of recognition. There are more people starving for recognition than there are starving for food. Why is praise so sought after? Because, like gold and diamonds, it is rare and hard to find. Can you remember how many times you were frustrated because your achievements and efforts went unrecognized? We can stop frustrating others by bearing the gift of recognition. Since praise is free, let's offer it freely, but it has value only when it is sincere.

The greatest gift we have to offer is that of time, for time is the stuff life is made of. As our only non-renewable resource, it is precious. What greater way of expressing love, than by devoting time to those we care about and those in need? Walt Whitman, the poet, expressed it this way, "Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity. When I give, I give

myself." When we give time to our friends, we draw them closer. When we give to our enemies, we change them into friends.

The best way to give is to share whatever little we have, graciously. I have a nice touching story that shows how we can share.

One day morning the father was reading the news paper and his wife shouted, "How long do you plan to read the paper? Come and see what your darling daughter is doing."

This is very common in every house. When a child does well or achieves something, the father would say proudly, "Look at **my** child." If a child fails the father or the mother would say, "Look at **your** child."

When his wife said 'your daughter', the father could make out that something has gone wrong. He kept the paper down and saw what was happening. His seven year old daughter Sindhuja was crying. His wife was forcing the daughter to eat curd rice but the child hates curd rice. When the mother forced her to eat curd rice, she felt helpless and started crying.

Her father kept the paper down and went and sat next to his daughter. He put his arms around the shoulders of his dear daughter and pleaded, "Dear Sindhuja, kindly eat at least two spoons otherwise your mother would scold me." He mockingly looked at his wife. The child wiped her tears and said, "Papa, I will not only eat two spoons but eat the entire bowl of rice. But will you give me whatever I want?" The father was in a generous mood and promised her. Sindhuja did not eat but looked at her mother who was still angry. "Mama, will you also promise to give me?" Asked the child. The mother said, "First finish eating and then I shall promise."

The child silently ate the entire bowl of rice. The father could feel the suffering of the child. He knew that the child did not like it but was forcing herself to eat for getting some favour. He empathised with the child.

Sindhuja finished eating and washed her hands and mouth; drank water and came running to the father. She was very cheerful. She jumped on her father's lap; put her little arms around his neck and smiled sweetly. "Papa, now will you give whatever I want?" Father was now worried. In an enthusiasm he had promised her. What would he do if she asks for a very costly thing? He requested her, "Dear Sindhuja, please do not ask for a very costly thing. You know that your father is not a rich man." Sindhuja again smiled and said, "No papa, I am not asking a costly gift. It is very cheap." The father said, "Then go ahead and ask child."

Now, everybody was watching her. Her mother, grandmother were curious to know what the child desires. Sindhuja brought her mouth close to her father's ear and said, "Papa is tomorrow a Sunday?" He said, "Yes dear." Then the girl said, "Then...then will you take me to the barber's place and get my head shaved?" The father could not believe what he heard. It was a shock. What a funny and silly thing to ask! Sindhuja's mother and grandmother jumped up in the air and screamed, "What non-sense! How can a girl get her head shaved? This is inauspicious. This cannot happen." Their looks admonished the poor child. The father spoke, "What kind of request is this? You are such a lovely child with a round face. You will not look nice with a shaven head. Ask something else."

The child started to cry again. She begged, "Papa you only told me a few days ago that one should not go back on the promises made. You had promised me a few minutes ago that you would get me whatever I wanted. And it is not costly also. Even if I do not look nice, I want to get my head shaved and I will not tell you the reason now."

The father looked at the angry people on the other side and smiled, "O.K. child. I will fulfil your request. Tomorrow morning I shall take you to the saloon."

In spite of the opposition in the house he took her to the barber's place and got her head shaved. His charming daughter was looking very funny.

The next day the child got ready to go to school. You can visualise the child. She was ready with a nice bag at the back, water bottle on the right shoulder, tiffin carrier in the left hand and the shaven head! Father took her in the car and dropped her near the school gate. She did not go inside but waited near the gate. When her father gestured her to go inside she shouted, "No papa, I am waiting for my friend to come." Her father also waited for some time in the car.

Just then another car came and stopped behind this car. A little boy almost of the same age as Sindhuja jumped out of the car and slowly walked towards the gate waving at Sindhuja. She looked very happy. What surprised Sindhuja's father was the shaven head of the boy. He was amused. He wondered whether shaven head was a part of the school uniform.

One lady came out this car and approached him. Tears were rolling down her cheek. She stood before him and asked, "Sir, are you the father of Sindhuja?" He said, "Yes." Still he was looking at the boy. "Is that boy your son?" He asked. She answered in the affirmative. He smiled and added, "See how funny is the situation! My daughter was very adamant and got her head shaved yesterday and did not give the reason for it. Now I see your son also with the shaven head. Do you know the reason for this common act?"

The lady suddenly sobbed. She folded her hands in a gesture of salutation. He was taken aback. "What happened?" He enquired. She said, "I am sorry sir. I do not know for how many births you have done penance to get an angel like Sindhuja as your daughter. You are truly blessed."

She continued, "My son has not shaved his head. He is very sick. He is suffering from.....blood cancer ....leukaemia. We have started to give him chemotherapy for the last two months. He lost all his hair due to the side effects of the chemotherapy. Your daughter Sindhuja would come to our house every week and enquire about his health. She would also plead with him to come to school. Last Friday she came to our house and

asked my son to promise that he would come to school today. He refused to come back to school fearing the unintentional but cruel teasing of the schoolmates. She put her little hands on the hands of my son and told him, "Do not worry. I will see that nobody would tease you. It is my responsibility." And my son agreed and this is the first day he has come to school after many months and that too only for her sake." She was still sobbing.

"When I saw Sindhuja standing near the gate with the shaven head, I realized immediately that it was the sacrifice this child made for my son. I never imagined she would sacrifice her lovely hair for the sake of my son! That is why I told you that Sindhuja is just not a child but an angel. How fortunate are you!"

Sindhuja's father was stunned. He stood transfixed. And then sat down and wept.

He held his face in the palms of his hands and cried, "Amma Sindhuja, my dear angel, will you grant me a boon? In this life you are born as my daughter. But at least in my next birth will you be born as my mother and teach me how to share love and care for others?"

We were all like Sindhuja when we were young. But as we grew, we became more selfish and forgot to share our love and concern.

Let us start once again this joyous journey of giving and sharing and discover the angel within us.

\*\*\*\*\*