

GRATITUDE

LEARNING TO RECEIVE WITHOUT A DEBT OF GRATITUDE

Recently I had the opportunity to travel for work and decided to extend my trip and visit with some old and new friends. It was my first trip to the US in 9 years. A few years ago I was unable to attend a close friend's wedding, so on this trip, I wanted to make time to visit with my dear friend, meet her husband in person and meet their 2-year-old son. It was great fun and we shared a lot of fun experiences and made new memories together. My friend knowing that things were tight for me financially on this trip was beyond generous and for this I'm grateful. In the past, I might've wondered how can I repay her kindness and although this thought did cross my mind momentarily, I know that she wasn't looking for reciprocation, she didn't have hidden motives or needs by acting with kindness.

I've known her long enough to know that when she gives something to someone - friends, family and strangers - it is with an open heart without the need to receive something in return. In fact, that is something I admire about her. When she lived in the same city as me she often provided assistance to others when they asked and even tried to help them move towards long-term solutions for stability. As I was getting to leave she came to my room with a travel goody bag filled with nutritious and not so nutritious snacks, tea and other thoughtful gifts. I could say that as a person who in the past had difficulty receiving, I was thankful and for 1 split second uncomfortable.

The real gift that was given to me was the feeling of being nurtured and cared for by my friend.

This split second of discomfort was a false sense of shame ("I am a grown woman, after all, I should be able to take care

of myself at this point") mixed with the immediate desire to want to be able to reciprocate in kind. I moved past it quickly because not only did the giver want to give something to me, when you feel the need to reciprocate you take away from the experience of both the giver and receiver. Of course the goodies were delicious, the other gifts thoughtful, useful, meaningful and long lasting but the real gift that was given to me was the feeling of being nurtured and cared for by my friend. That gift is now memory that continues to nourish me as I am reminded of her kindness now when drinking from the cute California Bear water bottle that was part of the package and literally nourished by the water I drink from an eco safe vessel.

I have worked in-depth on my own issues around receiving. So now I could receive more readily and easily. Sometimes old beliefs rise to the surface and then I put them in perspective and move on - not repressing them, just acknowledging them and moving on. Yeah, sometimes it's still not easy.

Our beliefs and personal truths, even when they are false, often stem from our own upbringing, family dynamics and cultural influences that we're not

LEARNING TO RECEIVE WITHOUT A DEBT OF GRATITUDE

even aware of - all the things that help create our identity. My identity was wrapped up in the fact that I often took pride in not having a need for a lot of material goods in order to have a good life using imagination and creativity. I also strongly identified with the idea that I always managed and liked to give whenever and whatever I could when I could.

When I was 14 or 15 years old my brother who was a few years older than me got a job at Sears and saved his money and with his employee discount bought me a bicycle. It was a generous gift and when it was presented to me I was stunned. It wasn't my birthday, there was no special occasion it was simply a gift that my brother thought to buy and give to me. This may sound sad or odd or both, and I am not exaggerating when I tell you that I turned to my mother who was present at the time and asked if they weren't telling me something - even though I felt healthy - I wondered was I dying of cancer and no one had the courage to tell me? So as you can see, I clearly had issues receiving even as a child.



Photo by Alesia Kazantceva

So a few weeks ago, a friend of mine was travelling to Germany and was flying out from my city. She was uncomfortable having to get to the airport by herself since she doesn't know my city well and travelled by bus here from her town. I met her at the station and before going to the

airport we had a coffee and short visit where I presented her with a small travel goody bag. I was inspired by my friend's generosity and wanted to let someone else feel cared for and nourished. It was a smaller packet, something that was within my means and was meant to nourish with healthy snacks, tissues, etc. When I gave this to my friend she was glad but also had a lot of difficulty accepting it - saying to me -

Oh I have nothing to give you, I have luggage and didn't bring you anything, next time we meet...

I stopped her and told her 3 things - I asked her to please accept the gift without obligation or reciprocation, followed by an old saying that my grandmother Sophie used to say -

When somebody gives you something say thank you.

And the story of how I recently felt nourished and cared for by my friend and that I wanted to do that for her too.

Although some people may give with the intention to manipulate or gain favour, it's not a balance sheet with checkmarks. When you receive or give you are never obligated to anyone or anything. It's not about who can give more or less. It's not a competition. You don't owe anybody anything. We are one, we are all interconnected and when we give we receive and when we receive we give.