

Reflections

Monday morning. Christmas is still 10 days off yet I feel its impending arrival like the freight cars that rumble by our front door on a regular basis. I hustle downstairs to Phil's office, which is adjacent to the Resource Center. I need to make sure he is ready to receive a large donation of toys that are due to arrive any minute.

I open the door, stick my head in and my visual field is immediately engulfed in a sea of green. The interior interconnecting doors are all open, allowing me to look down three or four offices in each direction. The green sea is actually Glad trash bags filled to capacity with wrapped presents. The sight brings a smile to my face. Later in the day I read Phil's bi-weekly update. 1400 children will be made happier from this ocean of gifts.

The gifts - the energy and focus it takes to deliver them with compassion and competence used to bring out ambivalent feelings in me. I know that the same ambivalence still affects my staff. "All this attention for a short time. All the focus and energy it takes for a brief moment of benefit. Getting a needy family a housing subsidy is more important and sustaining." That's how the ambivalence gets expressed.

Now I am just thankful for the gifts. I have come to see this ritual as an integral part of the larger circle of giving and receiving. Neither the giver nor the receiver can exist without the other.

In our large, complex, diverse and often class ridden society, conduits are needed to ensure the circle of giving and receiving is unbroken. SMOC is such a conduit. I honor that.

Later in the morning I am attempting to explain my theorem to a couple of our staff. "Look at it from an Eastern perspective," I say. "View these actions as the two essential parts of a whole. Only in the West do we look at the gift as an act isolated by time and space." One nods. The other looks like I just grew a third eye in the middle of my forehead. "Well, enough of that," I say as I walk out of the room. I know well and respect their passion for helping.

It's now early in the evening and as I commute home my mind meditates on the events of the day. I think of one statement in Marita's (Pathways Family Shelter Director) report. The shelter is bursting from the seams with gifts. We've run out of storage space hiding them. The challenge will be staying one step ahead of the children to surprise them on Christmas day. How appropriate. Is not Christmas celebrating the birth of a child to a homeless woman living in a temporary shelter.

Before arriving home on Monday I stop and pick up my daughter after her dance class. She is surely a happy child. Her mind usually full of thoughts of nature, her stuffed animals and the goodness of others. As I picture her emerging from the dressing room, usually skipping, humming a song and then when her eyes spot me, a "Hi Dad.", my being is nearly bowled over with emotions - Love, Hope, Fear - I know that all parents feel these.

This season is a time to reflect on the essential circle of giving and receiving, a central thread in the dance of life.

Christmas is a holiday for children.
God bless all of them.

James T. Cuddy
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