

What Our Giving Says

A “Mash-up” is a thing. According to the online dictionary it is officially, ‘something created by combining elements from two or more sources’. So our Advent or December series is a mash-up of Edwene Gaines book, *The Four Spiritual Laws of Prosperity*, and elements of the nativity story found in Luke and Matthew. Kind of like Bing Crosby and David Bowie—not the most likely pairing. But if you are a fan of Christmas music, you know Crosby and Bowie worked! So we’ll see how this mash-up goes.

Edwene begins her four laws with tithing. She advises that if you have three (or four) frogs to eat, swallow the biggest frog first. On a popularity scale, tithing is probably at the bottom of the list of topics folks want to discuss. So we’ll just start at the bottom and work our way up, swallowing the big frog first.

Did you know tithing is mainly mentioned in the Old Testament? It does not appear as any of the directions Jesus gives us because his focus was just on loving one another. As Unity understands the bible as a progression of spiritual maturity, tithing, or giving a tenth back to God, is one of those Old Testament practices we need in the beginning to move us in the direction of a deeper relationship in Oneness, as New Testament Jesus demonstrated. As the church became more organized, burnt offerings became monetary offerings. A tenth transitioned from the sacrifice of the first born of a herd or bushels of a crop to one tenth of the money coming into the household. In early Israel, the tithe of grain and animals was apportioned to widows, orphans and those unable to work for their own. Jesus was not a fan of the early transition over to money in which wealthy Jews purchased offerings at the temple. Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers. Eric Butterworth talks about tithing a tenth as “training wheels” on our way to understanding tithe as participating in the flow of God’s good. A tenth is easy to calculate is Eric’s reasoning. You get \$20, move the decimal over and you give \$2. You get \$200, move the decimal over and you give \$20. You see how it works.

Charles Fillmore, in the *Revealing Word* says tithing is “giving a tenth of one's supply to God and His work. Tithing is a tacit agreement that man is in **partnership** with God in the conduct of his finances.”

In essence, tithing is giving as an acknowledgment that as a collaborator with Divine Source we are part of an infinite flow. And despite the reference to

finances, a full tithe is more than money. The 4-T program describes tithing from time, talent and treasure. But why tithe?

Many of us have some wounding messages around tithing. It is required by the church. We do it to make God happy, which implies that God can get mad. It is a duty of membership. It will buy your ticket to heaven. Well, pretty much none of that applies. So back to “Why tithe?”

The Dead Sea is dead because it has no outlet. We give because we want to live in the flow. We give because we acknowledge that our life is a collaboration with Divine Source. If everything we have is **from** Divine Source, we’re just circulating some of it back to Source. How does it get back to Source? Throw it up in the air? Burn it so the smoke wafts up to Source? In our affirmations you will find, “I tithe where I am fed spiritually.” The circulation back to Source arises from your **intention around giving to where you are spiritually fed** as much as anything.

Yes, we hope Unity of Lehigh Valley provides food for your soul and therefore invite tithing here to be a way of circulating good back to Source—whether you are giving time, talent or treasure. Yet Unity is more interested in your wellbeing than in your tithe. So if you don’t feel spiritually fed here and are reluctant to give to ULV specifically, find someplace that feeds your soul. Find someplace that reminds you of your Oneness, your divinity and your divine power. We don’t want you to disconnect from your relationship with God because you don’t like something someone here did or said. However, if you don’t tithe because you don’t believe in giving back to Spirit, we would like to help you work on that. Not tithing or giving is disconnecting from God. If you believe “God is my Source” and you say, “I don’t have enough to give”, what are you saying about your Source? See, that is the tricky part about tithing. We can’t discount our tithing without limiting ourselves as a channel and without limiting our Source. When we let fear and lack take over, we deny the magnificence of our Creator, our Divine Source. Well that **is** a big frog to swallow.

In the nativity story, the idea of gifts associated with Jesus is introduced in Matthew. Wise men came from the East bearing gifts. The words for “wise men” have also been interpreted as Kings and as Magi, who were Zoroastrian priests. Charles Fillmore and interestingly Native American culture indicates the East represents wisdom and understanding. Also, as the sun rises in the East, it represents new beginnings.

In Unity we read the bible as stories about our consciousness with a deeper meaning within the story we refer to as the “metaphysical” or “beyond the physical” meaning. Jesus represents our own Christ consciousness. So one interpretation of the gifts coming from the East for the baby might be: Wisdom tells us that giving is a path to honor and develop the Christ consciousness. That is the interpretation I’d like to work with. So what do the gifts brought in the story tell us and what does our own giving say about our faith?

The easy, ego response says, “Well from Frankincense, Gold and Myrrh, we know these dudes were richer than me!” The humorous response: “Well if they had been wise women instead of men, they would have gotten there in time for the birth and they would have brought practical gifts like casseroles and cotton onesies for the baby.”

A little more serious response might say that the gifts they brought were **precious**. They were valued. One of the first stories in the Bible was about tithing. Cain and Abel both gave offerings to God. Abel raised animals and he gave the firstlings or the best. Cain raised crops and he gave what was left and what he thought he could spare. God said Abel did a better job tithing. The story takes a tragic turn after that because Cain did not have access to anger management counseling. The issue was not the amount or the type of offering, or even whether God was pleased or not; the issue was the intent to offer up to Spirit what is precious or to offer what is left over.

When I discovered Unity I was in my twenties. Still pretty young. I dabbled in the idea of tithing. I tried to explain to God that I had student loans, a house, dogs to feed, a car payment. I was patient with God. And the surprising thing was that God was patient with me. I grew into tithing and I grew into understanding that it was the relationship and **trust** in Spirit that was expanding. I gave first when I got paid. I gave first and the bills came and got paid. I gave what I thought I could in the beginning and just kept expanding that. The Christmas tradition is full of stories of giving. Probably the most famous related to the nativity is the Little Drummer Boy. The story of a poor boy who plays his drum for the baby Jesus essentially stands for the idea that we all have *precious gifts* to give to Spirit. We give where we are spiritually fed what is precious to us: our time, our talents and our financial treasure. It is the action of giving that builds our relationship in the flow of our divine inheritance. We are spiritual beings with access to infinite substance. We are love in expression. So we have an infinite wellspring to give **from!** Giving and receiving is our natural participation in flow.

Edwene's book has some wonderful stories about tithing where she is spiritually fed and openings to increased flow. She has affirmations about giving: *I have wonderful gifts to give and I choose to give generously. There is no greed in me. I love to share. And most importantly: I choose to live in TRUST.*

The wise men brought gifts for an infant. They had no expectation they would get anything in return. Babies make it easy to understand giving with no expectation of return. We give because it is our spiritual nature to give. The true self, divine self of us lives in TRUST as part of this endless divine flow. We are beginning our series with tithing and it is also the Advent Sunday of Hope or Faith, as in our Daily Word. Faith is **expecting** our good and **trusting** the flow of giving and receiving to be in balance.

Remember I said the way to give back to Spirit depended on intention. The Universe reads our heart. You cannot give with the **intention** of getting and have the Universe read that as giving; *giving to get* is barter. "I'll give you this and you give me that." If I tithe, I'll get _____. You fill in what you expect to get in return for tithing. The one thing Jesus said about giving was "Give to Cesare that which is Cesare's and give to God that which is God's." Tithing has nothing to do with tax exemptions or tidying up our year end accounting. I do not believe the Universe cares whether you tithe before or after taxes. I think the Universe is more interested in your **Trust** and acting from your true nature of giving.

The emotion that drives our bartering more than anything is fear. That's why our statements include a couple denials: *I choose in this moment to release all sense of burden, struggle and fear. There is no fear in me. God provides lavishly for me and all humanity. We fear there is not enough so we affirm: There **is** enough for everyone.* If we find ourselves calculating the tithe or giving any gift out of an intention to receive a specific amount or thing, we have thrown a monkey wrench into the operation of the principle of giving and receiving. We must affirm: *I have wonderful gifts to receive and I receive joyously*, without locking into what our gifts look like or when they must arrive. This affirmation also invites us into a deeper awareness of what our gifts are! The deepening awareness of receiving is part of the gift of giving in a sense of flow. The baby has no awareness of the gifts but as we grow from that first awakening into greater maturity we are aware of the gifts we receive.

So what about the idea of the "whole tithe"? The wise men brought precious **treasures** and they also took the **time** to make the journey.

They used their **talents** to follow the star and outwit King Herod and they risked a journey they really had no certainty about how it would go. When we talk about tithing our time, talent and treasure, it is always interesting to see where we focus on holding out on giving. For some it is easy to give time and not treasure or money. For some it is frightening to think about giving talent because we fear we have no talent or gifts to give in that area. For some they gladly give money but have not a moment to spare. Take a deep breath. We need healthy boundaries. We need self-care. AND, we need to find balance in our giving. This spiritual community is truly blessed by many gifts of time as people serve on the board, serve as chaplains, serve on Sundays and go out of their way to provide transportation for others. We are blessed by the talents of musicians, cooks, teachers, tech people, wood carving, maintenance and repair, artists, and writers. There is no shortage of demonstrations of tithing here at Unity of Lehigh Valley.

And as we grow in spiritual understanding during this holy season, let us explore what limits we might be clinging to and choose to let go of.

I invite you to participate in writing the affirmations that go with this series, either in a journal—and we have a couple left to purchase for \$10—or just grab a sheet on the back table and write them daily in a spiral notebook or on a tablet. Speak them out loud. Notice the energy each one stirs in you. If you resist something, stay with that resistance and see where it leads you. It might be an old wound or an old message from parents or teachers that it is time to let go of. The instructions for the writing exercise also invite you to take note of your flow—your giving and receiving during this experiment in prosperity. What do you give easily, what do you hold back, what stresses you to give? Is your giving in barter for something you expect—including love or admiration? What do you see as gifts you are receiving? How much do you focus on those?

This mash-up is just one grand experiment! It is a wonderful time to explore prosperity as not only financial well-being but well-being in every part of our life as we take a fresh look at what the nativity story might tell us. Today stands for the importance of allowing giving to be an expression of our Trust in the infinite flow of the Universe and an acknowledgment of our Oneness with Spirit. Next week we are going to see what Mary might teach us about having a divine purpose and plan. That should be interesting!