

36 Steps Toward a Gift Economy

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To change society we must think a different way about the world we live in:

1. We must realize that market exchange is not natural, real or necessary. It is an invention of patriarchy. The illusion that some religions find life to be is created by the disalignment of our behavior, and constructions of reality, with the deeper logic of nature. Women are more “natural” because they are in alignment with this logic while patriarchy is an aberration and an illusion. Our disalignment and refusal to practice and value this deeper logic create our unhappiness and our problems.
2. Realize that market exchange creates negative relations which foment isolation, competition, war and domination.
3. Understand that exchange — giving in order to receive an equivalent of What has been given — is artificial and is derived from a more fundamental behavior which has a logic of its own. This more fundamental behavior is gift giving, giving directly to satisfy needs.
4. Realize that gift giving creates positive relations, through direct need satisfaction which creates bonding, communication and community.
5. Exchange and gift giving constitute two ways of thinking and behaving that coexist but the gift giving way remains largely unconscious. Many problems derive from the co existence and interaction of these two logics and behaviors.
6. Exchange and gift giving constitute two paradigms or world views which compete with and complement each other. Exchange conceals gift giving, competes with it and takes advantage of its gifts. Gift giving gives in to exchange and gives value to it. Gift giving also often misrecognizes itself as valueless.
7. One of the ways gift giving is hidden in a society based on market exchange is by recognizing it only in mothering, charity, and forms of symbolic gift-exchange. For example this society likes to look at the basis of language as biological, a hard wiring of our brains. Gift giving can be seen as the basis of language at many levels, as the creation of human relations through the giving and receiving of verbal gifts, the mothering tongue. By restoring gift giving to the many areas of life in which it has been unrecognized and concealed, we can begin to bring the gift paradigm to consciousness and revise our thinking accordingly. Thus gift

giving underlies the synonymy of language “meaning” and the meaning of “life”.

8. Life beyond the areas of mothering and charity seems to be governed by the ways of the “manhood agenda” which are overvalued. Nevertheless gift giving can be restored to our thinking. For example profit itself can be seen as a gift from the poor to the rich because it is constituted of surplus value, that part of the value of work not covered by the worker’s salary. Women’s free labor in the home, which would add some 40% to the GNP of the US (more in some other countries) can be seen as a gift of those practicing a gift economy to those practicing an exchange economy and to the whole system based on exchange.

9. Mothering and other types of free gift work are made difficult or even sacrificial by scarcity which is necessary for the functioning of the market. The scarcity is artificially created by the appropriation of the gifts of the many by the few, the gifts of poor countries by wealthy countries, the gifts of nature, the past and the future by the few for their profit in the present. The values of mothering are seen as unrealistic and devalued by misogyny. They are seen as the cause of suffering while women’s assertion of their suffering and the lack of satisfaction of their needs is seen as victimism. Rather the scarcity necessary for the market and the discounting of the gift Paradigm causes the suffering of women.

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10. The exchange economy has values of objectification, fetishism etc and has always had a problem in distinguishing what is social from what is biological. This depends on its distress as a product of masculation which interprets a social “manhood” agenda as biologically fixed. Why has this happened?

11. Masculation: All humans are born dependent so someone must care for them unilaterally from their earliest childhood. Women have been assigned this role by society due to the social interpretation of their biological capacities as opposed to men’s. Until they learn language baby boys identify with their mothers and participate with them in giving and receiving. When they learn that they are in a category which is the opposite of their nurturing mothers they have to find — or create — an identity the basis of which is NOT being like their nurturing mothers — that is not gift giving. What they find is the manhood agenda: independence (as opposed to the interdependence of giving and receiving) competition (as opposed to cooperation) domination (as opposed to communication at the same level) stoicism (as opposed to emotion). This false agenda has been taken as the human agenda instead of mothering. It has been projected into our institutions and deeply influences the way we construct reality.

12. Emotions are the maps towards gift giving. Manhood requires domi-

nating the emotions. So does the market.

13. Hitting, which also bridges the gap between people (though negatively) and is a way of creating relations (of dominance), is the masculated replacement for gift giving. It replaces gift giving at many levels from violence in the family to war.

14. Gift relations create community, males want the independence which seems to be given by the market. (Though if we extend our interpretation of gifts and recognition of needs we can see that we satisfy others need for independence by not giving to them.) The market supplies a post masculated way to do gift giving. It allows the head of the family to support the family with a salary, and to own and provide the means of giving, the means of production of gifts. Similarly capitalists own the means of production of commodities and the means of exchange-money.

What to Do

15. Restore the Mother image as the Human image and gift giving as the human way. See patriarchal religion as a projection of masculation, attempt to make women conscious of the gift ways they are already practicing and integrate gift giving back into our expectations for the male gender identity. Mother Earth is not just a metaphor. Nature actually functions according to the gift way, not the exchange way. There is a spectrum of gift giving from the least to the most intentional. If we project our understanding as MOTHERED children back onto this spectrum we can recognize gifts of nature. If we project the non nurturing perspective of exchange we will see nature as objectified. Our understanding of nature as alive or dead really depends on whether we project the gift giving way onto her or not. And very much the same for ourselves. The point of view of the ego created by exchange is very limited. Taking the point of view of the other as having a need which we might satisfy, of many others, expands our perspective. Consciously create and value gift based egos rather than exchange egos by standing at a meta level, realizing we are living in a market based society, working for a shift in the paradigm through social change and vice versa for social change through a shift in the paradigm, while at the same time maintaining our “selves” and our bodies as viable in an exchange based world. This may mean participating in the exchange economy while at the same time doing gift giving to social change and at an individual level (for example within the family) and validating the gift way at a meta level. So for example someone would have a job in the market (hopefully in a non polluting and non exploitative business). They would give money, time and creative imagination to social change activities while validating the gift paradigm and their own gift giving both socially, intellectually, spiritually and in their individual relations. They would also critique the exchange economy. Create models of viable gift projects which validate the gift paradigm.

16. Create and believe in a women’s culture with the economic base of

gift giving now still burdened by the exchange economy, patriarchy and its values, but possible to liberate. It is important to do this within the oppressor cultures because this is where the values of patriarchy and the market are validated and produce harm.

17. Stand at a meta level Look at the big picture Restore the idea of gift giving where it has been eliminated or seen as Victimism see all levels of needs — which have been hidden under other descriptions. need for social change, need for truth, needs of the market, created needs caused by scarcity practice gift gaze instead of exchange gaze Realize that we cannot make this change alone Promote a paradigm shift Promote decision making according to the values of gift giving while realizing that we are living in a society based on exchange. Act in accord with gift values while not self destructing. Criticize patriarchal exchange, the market and globalization Patriarchy is a societal disease. Gift giving is healthy because it creates alignment with nature. (We can understand free will in these terms: we can choose exchange or giftgiving; both are products of socialization but one aligns with nature while the other distorts, dominates and exploits it) (Perhaps illness happens because a gift giving body or mind finds itself out of alignment with an exchange based society.)

18. In our personal lives empower ourselves with gift values. gratitude, community, turning towards the earth. spirituality. Pay attention to needs, validate empathy. Learn to receive and give with dignity and sensitivity. Validate those values not only by doing gift giving practically, but consciously.

19. Do projects that promote gift paradigm — with the full consciousness that we are not “there” yet. These include projects that also interrupt and unmask patriarchy like projects on environmental issues, globalization, nuclear armaments, militarization or death penalty. Propose gift giving and its values as an alternative to patriarchy and as a standpoint from which to understand, criticize and dismantle it. Propose that patriarchy dismantles itself. (We have seen this happen in examples of unilateral disarmament, as happened in the USSR under Gorbachev). This has the advantage that it can be non violent, lasting, and can have the advantage of the self knowledge of the powerful. (If it is true that power never gives up without a struggle, which I stand in contrast to anyway, let that struggle take place inside the conscience of the powerful.) (If everyone, male and female, has values based on gift giving, if we are homo donans, then the powerful as well as the weak function according to gift giving. The problem is that the values and agenda of masculation and exchange have taken over as their way of interpreting the world and acting in it. Now not only do the wealthy and powerful believe in the value of domination, the poor and disempowered also believe in it so that the only way to survive and help others survive in our society seems to be to become powerful replacing those who are at the top in the system. (This applies to women, ethnic groups, religions and nations). However the system

itself is an expression of patriarchy and the values of masculation. We can change the system by stepping down and stepping back from it together. Only by recognizing it for what it is, a sort of torture wheel for all, can we give it up and start over on the basis of nurturing for all. The nurturing values are already there we only have to uncover, not reinvent them. Understand what is going on.

20. Suspect and refuse reasoning and motivations based on exchange such as retribution, equality, self interest. Realize that they resonate with Exchange and may appear more “just” for that reason. Lies are based on self interest while the truth satisfies the need of the other like a gift.

21. Address the false reflections about gift giving AND about the market itself come from the market. Actually the critique of essentialism is based on exchange and market values. At an economic level there is no “common property” or “essence” among property owners except their relation of mutual exclusion and their ability to exchange using money, from time to time considering their property — and work — as having the “property” of exchange value. Both exchange and gift giving are processes which not only distribute goods but generate human relations and identities. The kind of identity fostered by exchange is atomistic, self sufficient, and individualistic, denying connection (and denying the gifts it receives). It has no “essence” but a common lack of connection and it asserts this as a value. Thus the critique of essentialism comes from an exchange paradigm position.

The separation of “family and business” of the private and the Economic spheres, has focussed gift giving within the family. Recognizing gift giving or mothering only in the mother child interaction, considering it inferior and as the biologically defined task of women, (as opposed to the variety of market and property — defined individualistic values and identities) leads us to abstract from this limited area a “common quality” of altruism as opposed to the apparent variety of qualities coming from the market and the values of the manhood agenda which have been incarnated into the market — independence, egotism, competition, domination, accumulation.

This reasoning has three defects:

1. Altruism is logically and psychologically different from egotism because (especially in abundance) it informs and diversifies the self as well as the other. In fact the variety of individuals and groups actually arises from the different kinds of nurturing they receive and give as children and, behind a wall of individual and collective denial, as adults (for example in the unacknowledged free labor of others)

2. Restricting the area of instances from which to abstract a “common quality” regarding mothering — gift giving — to the mother-child interaction is much too limited. Mothering takes place in many other areas of

life — practically everything BUT the market exchange — though unrecognized.

3. Mothering — gift giving — is not a state but a creative process. Abstracting from a state or series of states is different from abstracting from a process or different instances or levels of a process. Abstracting from states we may find an essence, attempting to abstract from a process at different levels and instances of a process gives us a common logic or series of interconnected behaviors. If mothering is a process which takes place at different levels, abstracting its commonalities does not give us an essence. It gives us the logic of the gift.

Understand that the point is to liberate gift giving from the burden of the market and patriarchy by seeing humanity as homo donans, the giving being, not just homo sapiens. We have to be given to, and to creatively receive, in order to know.

Lay the blame where it belongs. It is the market process that creates the monolithic economic “essence” of exchange value or “economic” value. This essence is important as a model in Our Patriarchal Capitalistic society and distorts the way we look at everything. Religion and philosophy deal with essences which reflect, or perhaps are even based upon or projections of this economic “essence”.

Actually gift giving and receiving create a variety of qualitatively different identities and values (of which exchange value is only one among many — based on that singular quality which is quantity). Thus the desire for variety, creativity and meaning in connection can actually be satisfied by gift giving and receiving while it is satisfied only apparently by the market, and at the expense of connection.

Thus both essentialism and the critique of essentialism come from market based reasoning.

25. The exchange paradigm is consonant with its values of competition, competes with the gift paradigm. This competition is made necessary also by the very creativity and viability of gift giving, the need of the market for free gifts, and the need of patriarchy for the assertion of “manhood” and its values as superior, whether transposed into the market or lived by actual males. Gift giving, for its part, in consonance with its values, unfortunately gives to the market and to males, and gives way to exchange value and the manhood agenda.

26. Recognize the importance of logical paradoxes. Unlike exchange, the gift process is not constructed around self reflection. At least in market society where gift giving and exchange coexist, the process of self reflection has been taken over by self reflecting exchange and identified with it. Thus Derrida says the gift should not be recognized because if the person who is doing it self-reflects she is rewarded for giving and the gift

is transformed into an exchange. If gift giving cannot be recognized it becomes difficult to consciously generalize it. What is basically a logical paradox becomes a practical paradox, and is seen as a moral problem. That is, the issue is transferred to another plane on which the gift giver is accused and held responsible for “actually” exchanging. (It seems people can always “give” their suspicion). She is accused of a lie when actually exchange has the structure of the lie and is the norm. On the other hand, if gift giving were generalized and made the norm there would be no particular ego reward for doing it.

27. Recognize that things we think of as properties or qualities are often relational. Like gift giving the market is seen as a state or collection of states with the common quality of exchange value incarnated in money. Those states are actually parts of a process of abstraction of the common quality. That abstraction process IS the market process or mechanism. Thus essentialism is a pale reflection of the misinterpreted market process which is a process of the extraction of the “essence” of exchange value. Another reflection of the common quality of exchange value is “power”, the masculine form of this “essence”. Although power is seen as a quality or property it is actually relational and involves the dominance of one in polarity with the many who give way and give to the one.

28. Do projects of gift giving with the full consciousness that a generalization of gift giving to the system at large is necessary: volunteerism, charity, community activities, parenting, teaching, spirituality etc. are not just ends in themselves but must be generalized towards the gift paradigm in order to make a better world for all. Support large scale projects of government with this generalization in mind. Gifts from rich to poor countries should not contain hidden exchanges.

29. Remain conscious that the exchange paradigm seeks to discount gift giving in innumerable ways: the gift of babysitting that was suspected. The free sandwich seen as not respectful. Recognize the psychological baggage. Recognize that while it may appear that doing gift giving “immodestly” or “overtly” is thought to be a virtue, it keeps gift giving in validated because no one knows about it and secrecy seems to hide something shameful. Perhaps by connecting giving to a different economic way and an ideology we can take it out of this psychologically difficult place. Its because gift giving is an individualistic thing to do in a culture based on exchange that makes it ambiguous. With more gift giving in the culture it would not seem to be done for ego perks because it would be more common. Not sending helicopters to pick up flood victims because the country could not pay for them.

30. Appreciate and learn from gift aspects of indigenous cultures.

31. Educate all children to be nurturing like their mothers. And educate mothers to validate gift giving and to see its extensions in society at large. Refute the idea that there is a biologically non mothering “supe-

rior” gender encourage boys to be emotional like girls, so they can empathize and recognize needs more easily. Encourage the leveling of the roles as is already happening. See those roles as gift aspects and emphasize those.

32. See gift giving in all the different aspects of life so that our alignment with them can be recognized when and if it happens. These include: both internal and external psychological gift giving; gift giving in nature; the consideration of messages as gifts, the consideration of biological gift giving and giving on an atomic level.

33. Use the idea of a gift economy to bridge the differences in the women’s movement so that it can unite across its diversity behind common goals and values to dismantle patriarchy. Link the different aspects of the women’s movement on the basis of this common economic way having a superstructure of gift values. Use the idea of the gift economy to unite the women’s movement with the mixed progressive movements under the banner and leadership of women and women’s (gift giving) values.

34. Let men (and women) see that the manhood agenda as understood in Patriarchy and capitalism is a mistaken identity that is robbing them (and Races, and nations) of their humanity, and that has been projected in the Larger society causing devastation. Understand the psychology of patriarchy. Let councils of women create teaching modules for men by which they can wean Themselves from maculation and its values and begin practicing and Validating gift giving and its values. Have individual women personal Trainers for gift giving, training both women and men.

35. Link other mixed movements on this basis of mothering: These are, for example, movements for Peace The environment (look at the profound implications of the image of Mother Earth) Anti racism.

Look at different place given to gift giving in different cultural groups even just within the US. Anti death penalty: mercy movement Anti domestic violence: Spirituality based on female images of God Anti fundamentalism Economic justice, to the extent that capitalism is criticized but not to the extent that it promotes assimilation into capitalism, or at least only with the understanding that the way to peace for all is not through monetization. Economic justice is an illusion because Capitalism needs free gifts therefore it cannot function for everybody.

36. Envision what to do in the future. Do anthropological studies of cultures doing gift giving in order to find the different ways the gift economy has been practiced and the effects it has had. Enlist the help of surviving members of those cultures. Create and validate a new popular psychological understanding of “human Nature” as a social product and nurturing rather than as aggressive and competitive. Do collective studies of how to’s such as: how to assess needs, provide abundance, give and

receive respectfully, how much technology to use, how to organize agriculture, distribution, education. Evaluate the use of alternative currencies to step down from the market. Consider structuring society according to age-based work marked by rituals and organizing age-based ongoing education according to this structure. Validate abundance for the many and work to create it. Create small scale pilot projects to work out possible problems in practicing the gift economy and serve as models as well as educating the educators. (Large scale experiments like Soviet Communism involve too many people and can have devastating effects.) Let these experiments include the creation of small local governments and gift initiatives. Do large scale cooperative work to solve the problems created by capitalist patriarchy such as poverty, disease and environmental devastation. Create a culture of kindness in which oppression is not validated and impulses towards domination and exploitation are interrupted habitually by all. Eliminate patriarchal hierarchies Give leadership to councils of women elders.

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Women must lead this transition not because men don't also do gift giving and have those values but because men have been taught that they are something other, that they have a manhood agenda of dominance and competition, and our institutions and economy have been built on that lie. Women have also been taught and believe the lie that men are something else and that women not only are not adequate to be male but are supposed to be the "complement" of the artificial manhood agenda. In fact our society is built on this social lie, the lie of the father, and his father before him. Women must lead also because we have been doing more free work for centuries than men, paying attention to needs in the family and in society. Otherwise children and society would not have survived. We must lead, informed by the values of the gift economy which we have been practicing so that gift giving can be restored as the way to peace and abundance for all.