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The future of philanthropy lies in how successfully it rolls back to its past, and how closely it aligns itself with the demands of the present. Our ancient philosophy did not assign a hierarchy to giving and receiving, but viewed both as partners of every interaction. As a depleted planet forces us to accept the concept, and responsibilities of an interconnected world, corporate philanthropy must also have a business plan. This alone can achieve the two essentials of sustainability and scaling up

The future of Giving

Today giving away money has become a substitute for philanthropy in its true sense. Giving cannot be a means to bury guilt or strike a barter deal with the almighty, or worse, increase your social equity. By that, even the Mafia is philanthropic

Gautama the Buddha, on the other hand, said if you give away your own food when you are hungry, you become stronger, not weaker. This is a truly enlightened idea, because in taking, you receive material things, but in giving, you receive immense strength and power. This is why all spiritual traditions talk about 'surrender' or 'letting go' or 'love' or 'devotion'. When you give painfully, it is sacrifice. When you give joyfully, it is love.

For a seeker, developing an attitude of devotion is actually a trick to receive. Because when you are devout, you become receptive. If your energies are truly receptive, the divine has to reach out. It has no choice. If your energies have really become an invitation to the divine, no one - not the guru, not God - can refuse you.

Giving at an individual level is good for the individual and the people around him, but if we want to see big changes in society then this idea has to be incorporated into its myriad institutions. We need to extend this beyond the machinery of the state. I am not speaking of the creation of some utopian welfare state. Communism would have been a fabulous idea if people were inclined to give, or give up, voluntarily.

The story goes that Mark Twain traveled to Russia to see this wonderful phenomenon. He was taking a walk in the countryside when he saw a country gentleman striding along with a hen under each arm. Mark Twain approached him and said, "Sir, are you a Communist?" He replied, "Yes, Comrade, I'm a committed party member."

Twain persisted and got the same replies. "Is it true that if you have two villas, you would give away one to somebody who doesn't have one?" "Yes, of course, Comrade, I am a Communist." "If you had two carriages would you give away one to the person who doesn't have one?" "Of course, Comrade, I'm a Communist."



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is a profound mystic and visionary humanitarian. He regularly addresses international forums like the World Economic Forum, the UN, and the Indian Economic Summit, discussing a broad range of topics, including leadership, environment, science and spirituality.

Giving and receiving is the basis of all transactions, indeed of every interaction. Yet, we are constantly trying to elevate one to a place of sanctity and the other to subordination. Giving is hurraed as superior; receiving hides in embarrassed shadows. The distinction is irrational. Can one happen without the other?

My great grandmother often told this story. There was once an old, wealthy farmer. He owned a large piece of fertile land which he cultivated well. Before he died, he called his two sons and told them, "Whatever comes out of this land, both of you should share it equally." The brothers honoured their father's dying command, and always shared the produce equally between themselves.

As time passed, one of them got married and had five children. The other remained single. But the agricultural produce was always divided fifty-fifty. One day, one of the brother's thought to himself, "It is not fair that I take half the produce because when I grow old, I will have five young sons to support me. My brother has nobody, no security, so he should get more than me".

So, that night he went to his own granary, picked up a large sack of corn, crept across to his brother's granary and secretly put it there. He kept doing this off and on.

Ironically, the same idea entered the younger brother's mind. He thought, "I am alone while my brother has such a large family to support. But he gets the same quantity that I do. This is not right." But he knew his brother would not accept his generosity. That night he picked up a sack of grain, and secretly put it in his brother's granary.

This kept going on. One day each of them, with a sack on his back, walked towards the other's granary at the same time, and came face to face with each other. Suddenly they realised what had been happening. Their clandestine generosity embarrassed them. They looked away, continued their journey, put the sacks where they had to put them, and crept back to their own beds. After their death, when the people of that town started thinking of building a temple, they came to the decision that this spot where these two brothers discovered each other was the best place to raise it.

In this story, the place of unconditional giving becomes a temple. When you give, not as a calculation, but in a way that makes you embarrassed by your own generosity, it means you are carrying your own temple within you. You are allowing expression to the divinity within you.

Giving is not just a quality that you nurture; it is the very nature of life. Above all, what you give becomes your quality. In nature, something is 'red', for instance, because it holds back the other six colours and reflects only the colour red.

Then Twain said, "I can see you have two hens. Will you give me one because I don't have any?" The man spluttered, "What the hell! Why should I? These hens are all I have." So you see, people are always willing to give away what they don't have, not what they have.

Hand-outs may be inevitable in acute conditions. But chronic giving needs a business model. Without this, you will never be able to achieve the quintessential scaling up. Instead, you will have to scale down and the whole initiative will fall flat.

Today, there are many corporate leaders who are truly sensitive and evolved human beings. They have realized that 'charity' is neither sustainable nor is it a meaningful solution. To create a humane economy, corporate philanthropy and larger social responsibility have to be a given. Governments and the public sector cannot deliver enduring solutions of the scale that is needed.

What's the difference between the two? Businesses understand the mechanism of generating wealth and their philanthropic activity will incorporate this. They will create wealth rather than just hand out mind-boggling sums. Cheque-book philanthropy is obsolete and discredited.

The economic engine can either bring well-being or it can bull-doze. But today's consumers are forcing it to be responsible and inclusive. In the past, commercial power flowed from the barrel of the conqueror's gun. In neo-colonialism, countries and their companies marched into markets on the power of their capital. This too is no longer acceptable. Just listen to the heated debate at the current UN summit at Copenhagen.

The social and ecological impact of industries and products has to be factored in. This has created, and must keep creating, new definitions and new models of giving. It will do good to the world, and do us all a world of good.