

## Giving, Freedom and the Future

Richard A. Panzer  
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It could be fairly said the defining element of those who identify with the Unification Movement is that at one time or another in our lives, we have been touched by the teachings of Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon. Reflecting on Father's legacy, I have asked myself what is the core message he strove to leave behind? If I had to choose one word to describe Rev. Moon, what would that be?

For me, that one word would be: giving. To pick just two of countless times: his 14 hours of non-stop speaking about God's nature, will and ideal I experienced in the 1980s at Belvedere; and when he returned during temporary releases from Danbury prison and spent that time telling us not to worry, that God would use his incarceration to further bless America. The main lesson, in my mind, was: here is a man

who is constantly striving to find ways to give more and more.

While he was battling his federal court case in 1982, he launched The Washington Times, and in 1984, purchased 250 trucks to be used to deliver food to the needy shortly before entering prison. How many foreigners in the U.S. decide, while on trial or in prison, to spend more than a billion dollars of precious resources to serve the nation that incarcerated them?



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Those of us left behind after his passing to the spirit world face the question — what will we do now? Each of us has a different answer, but I suggest one way to pass on his legacy is to focus on this core teaching. After all, according to Rev. Moon, giving is not just a nice thing to do, it is the core attribute of God.

*“When God gives us love, how much would He want to give? God's love does not have a set limit. He wants to give infinitely. The God of absolute love is still frustrated that He has not been able to give all the love He wants to.”*

While there is nothing we can do to deserve the love of God, we can make effort to accept, reciprocate and practice it in our own lives. In this way, both Jesus and Rev. Moon taught, we can inherit God's heart and nature as our own.

Rev. Moon believed that in coming centuries and millennia, this standard of selfless giving will become the predominant way of living:

*“Tens of thousands of years after the twenty-first century, the world will follow the ideal of living for the sake of others, rather than the live-for-myself philosophy. People will not follow or like the live-for-myself way of thinking.”*

### How Scientists View Giving

Another question I've wondered about is how do you share this essentially religious/spiritual/prophetic guidance in an increasingly secular culture? Fortunately, a number of scientists have devoted considerable time researching the role of giving, both in the animal world and the world of human beings. Cutting-edge brain research offers evidence that humans are “hardwired” to give.

Consider the findings of a study published in the journal, *Science*, in 2008. Participants rated their happiness in the morning. They were then each given an envelope of \$20 that they had to spend by 5 pm and they were then told to again rate their happiness. Most people think they'd be happier spending the money on themselves, but the opposite was true. Those who spent the money on themselves were not happier, but those who spent it on others were significantly happier. The researchers also found that in a nationally representative sample, spending more of one's income on others predicted greater happiness. Similarly, people who came into a “windfall” fortune who spent money on others were significantly happier.



*Rev. Moon welcomed by clergy after release from Danbury prison in August 1985.*

Other studies discussed in Wharton School professor Adam Grant's 2013 book, *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*, show that even in the highly competitive world of business, "givers" are far more successful and respected than those who act primarily out of self-interest.

I believe Rev. Moon would have been excited to hear about such scientific findings that essentially confirm this core Unificationist teaching. Had he been alive today, I could envision him inviting these scientists to meet with him at East Garden to challenge them to do even more to explore and spread this message, as he did with scholars and scientists during the years our movement sponsored the International Conferences on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS).

### **The Giving Institute at UTS/Barrytown College**

For these reasons, I propose the establishment of the Giving Institute at UTS/Barrytown College. The institute would bring together spiritual and scientific perspectives on this essential human trait that Father exemplified in his own life and spoke about so often. It would foster the creation of documentary videos, curricula, conferences, journals and publications, all posted online, that delve into this theme, with hundreds of stories of sacrificial giving to inspire and encourage the coming generations to live this way of life.

As a first step, we are inviting people to send in stories of how giving, either by themselves or someone they know, impacted their lives (for more information or to submit a story, whether text, audio or video, contact us here).

We have also begun generating documentary videos that explore different aspects of "giving" in Barrytown College Media Arts classes. Similarly, Barrytown College's ongoing 2014 video competition has the theme of "giving."

### **Giving, Freedom and Wealth**

There is an essential relationship between freedom and giving that is important to consider, especially given the prevalence of opinions that other people should be compelled to give more. The divisive rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street that portrays the 1% vs. the 99% implies there is a war of the rich against the poor.

Movies like *The Wolf of Wall Street* depict wealthy people as selfish cads, but while such people surely exist, we need to be careful about judging people by their bank accounts. A significant number of rich people, in addition to providing jobs through innovations which made them wealthy to begin with, are deeply involved in philanthropy. Take the example of billionaire Charles Feeney, who, through his foundation, has given away 80% of his \$6.3 billion fortune to health and social projects in seven countries, and will spend the balance of his wealth by 2016.

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And Feeney is not the only one. The founders of Groupon and GoDaddy, along with billionaire investor Warren Buffett and Microsoft founder, Bill Gates and his wife Melinda, have each pledged to give away at least 50% of their wealth. Dozens of other billionaires have also taken the “Giving Pledge.”

Surely there are rich selfish cads. But while Rev. Moon challenged people of privilege to use their wealth for the benefit of others, he was also a staunch believer in free enterprise, having started numerous businesses and organizations for the purpose of supporting charitable, educational and religious activities all over the world.

We need to be concerned about any ideology that labels a group of people as being “evil,” whether that be a racist one that ascribes lesser value to people of different ethnicities or a class-based one that judges people based on their wealth.

Conversely, a worldview that convinces people of lesser means that the system is “rigged” against them, locking them into a bitter, defeatist attitude in their lives, poisons both themselves and those around them. All of us, regardless of our position or socio-economic status, can find a way to give, be generous, and forgive those who have hurt us. When we do so we are really blessing

ourselves.

### **Creating a Culture of Giving**

There is even some evidence that giving can make us richer. The economist Arthur Brooks tested the relationship between income and charitable giving. As expected, higher income led to higher giving. But unexpectedly, Brooks found that for every \$1.00 in extra charitable giving, income was \$3.75 higher a year later. Giving actually seemed to make people richer.

Research also shows that giving can actually be contagious. “Consistent contributors” cause others to contribute more often and cooperate more often.

We all need to be careful about burn-out. Studies show that if we’re not sure that our efforts are effective in helping others, we can lose our motivation. Adam Grant gives several examples of how increasing feedback helped people to become both more motivated and more effective in their work or in volunteering.

It’s important to remember the connection between freedom and giving. No one can be forced to be loving, giving or forgiving. It’s true many times we misuse freedom for self-centered or immature purposes, but that same freedom also allows us to grow, change and become better individuals.

It is my hope that the Giving Institute at UTS/Barrytown College will inspire people around the world in the coming decades to see new ways to serve, and in so doing, transform the purpose of our lives and of those around us.

Dr. Richard Panzer is President of UTS and Barrytown College. He co-authored *The War on Intimacy: How Agenda-Driven Sex Ed Sabotages Committed Relationships and Our Nation’s Health*. He received his doctorate in Educational Communication and Technology from New York University.