

OPENING MUSIC: Antonio Vivaldi – The Four Seasons, 'Autumn' (10:05)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7hGiZ579cs&list=RDH7hGiZ579cs&start_radio=1



OPENING WORDS

We have crept out of our close and crowded houses into the night and morning, and we see what majestic beauties daily wrap us in their bosom. . . .

These enchantments are medicinal, they sober and heal us. These are plain pleasures, kindly and native to us. We come to our own, and make friends with matter. . . . We never can part with it; the mind loves its old home: as water to our thirst, so is the rock, the ground, to our eyes, and hands, and feet.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

From "Nature," Essays: Second Series (1844)

CHALICE LIGHTING

We light this chalice as a symbol of the spark of life which abides within us and around us.

May it be as a light in a dark night, a light in a window that welcomes the weary traveller home!

May it be as a light in the hand of a trusted friend that guides us along the path!

May it be as the light in the face of one we love, bright with joy!

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Keep me, O God, from pettiness; let me be large in thought, in word, in deed. Let me be done with fault-finding and self-seeking. May I put away all pretence and meet everyone face to face without self-pity and without prejudice. May I never be hasty in judgment and always generous ... Let me take time for all things. Make me grow calm, serene and gentle. Teach me to put into action my better impulses, straightforward and unafraid. Grant that I may realise it is the little things of life that create differences and that in the big things of life we are one. And, O Lord God, let me not forget to be kind!

HYMN 62 – Here we have gathered (CD4, track 9, purple book)

CHARITY QUOTES

“Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.” — [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

“The simplest acts of kindness are by far more powerful than a thousand heads bowing in prayer.” — [Mahatma Gandhi](#)

MIRROR WITH A MALFUNCTION (by Pedro Pablo Sacristán) to be read by Sheila?

There was once a boy who was very rich and clever. He had practically everything a boy could ever want, so he was only interested in the most rare and curious of objects. This happened to him in relation to a very old mirror, and he convinced his parents to buy it from a mysterious old man. When the mirror arrived home, the boy went to see his reflection in it. His face looked very sad indeed. He tried smiling and making funny faces, but his reflection continued with its sad expression.

Surprised, the boy went off to buy sweets. He came home as happy as can be, to look in the mirror, but his image was still sad-looking. He bought all kinds of toys and old junk, but forever looked sad in that mirror. Fed up, the boy stuck the mirror off in a corner.

"Crikey, what a terrible mirror! It's the first time I've seen a mirror that didn't work properly!"

That same afternoon he went into the street to play and to buy a few toys, but on his way to the park he saw a little boy who was crying his heart out. The boy was crying so much, and looked so lonely, that the

rich boy went over to help him and to see what had happened. The little one told him that he had lost his parents.

Together the two boys set off in search of them. As the little boy wouldn't stop crying, our boy spent his money on buying him sweets to cheer him up. Finally, after much walking, they found his parents who were out looking for him, very worried.

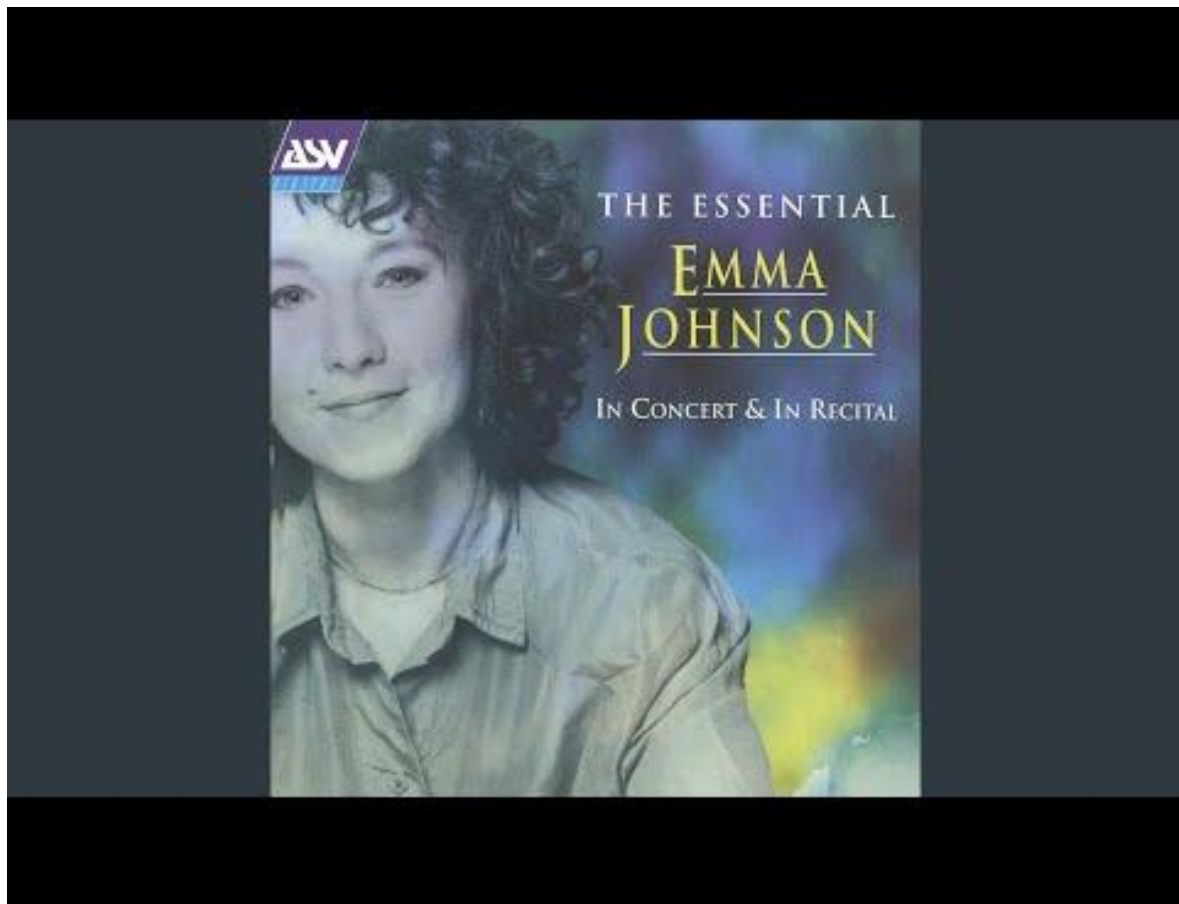
The rich boy said goodbye, and walked off towards the park. But, seeing the time, he decided to turn round and head for home, without having been able to play, without toys, and without money. At home, he went to his room, and noticed a shining light in the corner; the same corner he had left the mirror in. Seeing this, he went over to the mirror, and realised that the light was coming from his own body, so radiant with happiness he had become.

And so he understood the mystery of that mirror, the only mirror which could faithfully reflect the true joy of its owner. He realised it was true; he felt genuinely happy at having helped that little boy.

And since then, each morning when he looked in that mirror and failed to see a special shine, he already knew what he had to do to bring it back.

MUSIC: Paul Reade – Victorian Kitchen Garden Suite, 'Mists' (01:57)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H92ARDvck0E&list=RDH92ARDvck0E&start_radio=1



Maimonides' Eight Levels of Charity

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Charity, 10:7–14

There are eight levels of charity, each greater than the next.

[1] The greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to support a fellow Jew by endowing him with a gift or loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding employment for him, in order to strengthen his hand until he need no longer be dependent upon others . . .

[2] A lesser level of charity than this is to give to the poor without knowing to whom one gives, and without the recipient knowing from who he received. For this is performing a mitzvah solely for the sake of Heaven. This is like the "anonymous fund" that was in the Holy Temple [in Jerusalem]. There the righteous gave in secret, and the good poor profited in secret. Giving to a charity fund is similar to this mode of

charity, though one should not contribute to a charity fund unless one knows that the person appointed over the fund is trustworthy and wise and a proper administrator, like Rabbi Chananyah ben Teradyon.

[3] A lesser level of charity than this is when one knows to whom one gives, but the recipient does not know his benefactor. The greatest sages used to walk about in secret and put coins in the doors of the poor. It is worthy and truly good to do this, if those who are responsible for distributing charity are not trustworthy.

[4] A lesser level of charity than this is when one does not know to whom one gives, but the poor person does know his benefactor. The greatest sages used to tie coins into their robes and throw them behind their backs, and the poor would come up and pick the coins out of their robes, so that they would not be ashamed.

[5] A lesser level than this is when one gives to the poor person directly into his hand, but gives before being asked.

[6] A lesser level than this is when one gives to the poor person after being asked.

[7] A lesser level than this is when one gives inadequately, but gives gladly and with a smile.

[8] A lesser level than this is when one gives unwillingly.

BIBLE READINGS ABOUT CHARITY

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'

Matthew 6:1-4

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Proverbs 21:13

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

Acts 20:35

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Luke 21:1-4

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

MUSIC: Edvard Grieg – Lyric Pieces, Opus 12, No.1. Arietta (01:32)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TbQftYOKms&list=RD5TbQftYOKms&start_radio=1



THE ESSENCE OF CHARITY IN ISLAM, BUDDHISM & CHRISTIANITY

PART I – ISLAM

Charity is not just recommended by Islam, it is required of every financially stable Muslim. Giving charity to those who deserve it is part of Muslim character and one of the Five Pillars of Islamic practice. *Zakat* is viewed as “compulsory charity”; it is an obligation for those who have received their wealth from God to respond to those members of the community in need. Devoid of sentiments of universal love, some people know only to hoard wealth and to add to it by lending it out on interest. Islam’s teachings are the very antithesis of this attitude. Islam encourages the sharing of wealth with others and helps people to stand on their own and become productive members of the society.

In Arabic it is known as *zakat* which literally means “purification”, because *zakat* is considered to purify one’s heart of greed. Love of wealth is natural and it takes firm belief in God for a person to part with some of his wealth. *Zakat* must be paid on different categories of property: gold, silver, money; livestock; agricultural produce; and business commodities. It is payable each year after one year’s possession. It requires an annual contribution of 2.5 percent of an individual’s wealth and assets.

Like prayer, which is both an individual and communal responsibility, *zakat* expresses a Muslim's worship of and thanksgiving to God by supporting those in need. In Islam, the true owner of things is not man, but God. Acquisition of wealth for its own sake, or so that it may increase a man's worth, is condemned. Mere acquisition of wealth counts for nothing in the sight of God. It does not give man any merit in this life or in the hereafter. Islam teaches that people should acquire wealth with the intention of spending it on their own needs and the needs of others.

“‘Man’, said the Prophet, ‘says: My wealth! My wealth!’ Have you not any wealth except that which you give as alms and thus preserve, wear and tatter, eat and use up?”

The whole concept of wealth is considered in Islam as a gift from God. God, who provided it to the person, made a portion of it for the poor, so the poor have a right over one's wealth. *Zakat* reminds Muslims that everything they have belongs to God. People are given their wealth as a trust from God, and *zakat* is intended to free Muslims from the love of money. The money paid in *zakat* is not something God needs or receives. He is above any type of dependency. God, in His boundless mercy, promises rewards for helping those in need with one basic condition that *zakat* be paid in the name of God; one should not expect or demand any worldly gains from the beneficiaries nor aim at making one's names as a philanthropist. The feelings of a beneficiary should not be hurt by making him feel inferior or reminding him of the assistance.

Money given as *zakat* can only be used for certain specific things. Islamic Law stipulates that alms are to be used to support the poor and the needy, to free slaves and debtors, as specifically mentioned in the Quran (9:60). *Zakat*, which developed fourteen hundred years ago, functions as a form of social security in a Muslim society.

Under the caliphates, the collection and expenditure of *zakat* was a function of the state. In the contemporary Muslim world, it has been left up to the individual, except in some countries in which the state fulfills that role to some degree. Most Muslims in the West disperse *zakat* through Islamic charities, mosques, or directly giving to the poor. Money is not collected during religious services or via collection plates, but some mosques keep a drop box for those who wish it to distribute *zakat* on their behalf. Unlike the *zakat*, Giving other forms of charity in private, even in secret, is considered better, in order to keep one's intention purely for the God.

Apart from *zakat*, the Quran and Hadeeth (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) also stress *sadaqah*, voluntary almsgiving intended for the needy. The Quran emphasizes feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, helping those in need, and the more one helps the more God helps that person, and the more one gives the more God gives that person. One feels s/he is taking care of others and God is taking care of them.

PART II – BUDDHISM

The essence of true charity is to give something without expecting anything in return for the gift. If a person expects some material benefit to arise from his gift, he is only performing an act of bartering and not charity. A charitable person should not make other people feel indebted to him or use charity as a way of exercising control over them. He should not even expect others to be grateful, for most people are forgetful though not necessarily ungrateful. The act of true charity is wholesome, has no strings attached, and leaves both the giver and the recipient free.

The meritorious deed of charity is highly praised by every religion. Those who have enough to maintain themselves should think of others and extend their generosity deserving cases. Among people who practise charity, there are some who give as a means of attracting others into their religion or creed. Such an act of giving which is performed with the ulterior motive of conversion cannot really be said to be true charity.

Buddhism views charity as an act to reduce personal greed which is an unwholesome mental state which hinders spiritual progress. A person who is on their way to spiritual growth must try to reduce their own selfishness and his strong desire for acquiring more and more. They should reduce their strong attachment to possessions which, if they are not mindful, can enslave them to greed. What they own or have should, instead, be used for the benefit and happiness of others: his/her loved ones as well as those who need his/her help.

When giving, a person should not perform charity as an act of his body alone, but with his heart and mind as well. There must be joy in every act of giving. A distinction can be made between giving (act of generosity) and *dana*. In the act of generosity a person gives out of compassion and kindness when s/he realises that someone else is in need of help, and s/he is in the position to offer the help. When a person performs *dana*, s/he gives as a means of cultivating charity as a virtue and of reducing their own selfishness and craving. S/he exercises wisdom when s/he recalls that *dana* is a very important quality to be practised by every Buddhist, and is the first perfection (paramita) practised by the Buddha in many of His previous births in search for Enlightenment. *Dana* is performed in appreciation of the great qualities/virtues of the Triple Gem.

There are many things which a person can give. They can give material things: food for the hungry, and money and clothes to the poor. They can also give their knowledge, skill, time, energy or effort to projects that can benefit others. They can provide a sympathetic ear and good counsel to a friend in trouble. They can restrain himself from killing other beings, and by so doing perform a gift of life to the helpless beings

which would have otherwise been killed. They can also give a part of his body for the sake of others, such as donating his blood, eyes, kidney, etc. Some who seek to practise this virtue or are moved by great compassion or concern for others may also be prepared to sacrifice their own lives. In His previous births, the Bodhisatta had many a time given away parts of His body for the sake of others. He had also given up His life so that others might live, so great was His generosity and compassion.

But the greatest testimony to the Buddha's great compassion is His priceless gift to humanity, the Dhamma which can liberate all beings from suffering. To the Buddhist, the highest gift of all is the gift of Dhamma. This gift has great powers to change a life. When a person receives Dhamma with a pure mind and practices the Truth with earnestness, s/he cannot fail to change. S/he will experience greater happiness, peace and joy in his/her heart and mind. If s/he was once cruel, s/he becomes compassionate. If s/he was once revengeful, s/he becomes forgiving. Through Dhamma, the hateful becomes more compassionate, the greedy more generous, and the restless more serene. When a person has tasted Dhamma, not only will he experience happiness here and now, but also happiness in the lives hereafter as s/he journeys to *Nibbana*.

PART III – CHRISTIANITY (by Linda Jones)

What is charity? A guilty handful of coins rattled into a box on a street corner? The nudge of conscience at Christmas?

A common understanding of charity is what many people of faith would call 'almsgiving' - a strong tradition in both Christianity and Islam - as well as Buddhism and other faiths. During Lent, for example, Christians are urged to pray, to fast and to give alms (money or goods) to people in need. Motivation is important - in both Christianity and Islam giving alms in secret is better than receiving human praise for the practice.

Charity in Christianity is not just almsgiving, and should not be seen only as an obligation or duty. Charity is love. Christians believe that God's love and generosity towards humanity moves and inspires us to love and be generous in response.

Jesus taught that to love God and to love neighbour are the greatest commandments. Charity is not an optional extra, but an essential component of faith. In Matthew's *Gospel* (chapter 25), Jesus identifies himself with those who are poor and excluded, and teaches that we will be judged, not on how beautiful our altars are, but on the way that we treat others. We cannot profess to worship God in church, yet not express that love practically to our neighbour. And our neighbour is not

just someone local to us. In the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus made clear that our neighbour may be someone on the other side of the world, who is not 'one of us' but different. Because of our common humanity - because we are each created and loved by God - we cannot allow anyone to go without what is needed for a dignified life.

The early saints of the Christian church had a very challenging view of charity. They argued that what God provides generously and freely is effectively 'stolen' by those who hoard their wealth instead of sharing what they have with those in need. A Christian understanding of charity is far more radical and demanding than simply giving from what we have 'left over'. Christians believe that anything that we have is a gift from God and does not belong exclusively to us. It must be shared if there is someone who needs it more. Later church teaching expresses this love towards others as 'solidarity' with those in need. If we live by this principle, when we act out of charity or love we do not do it out of patronising pity, but out of commitment to the common good, so that every human being can reach their full potential.

For Christians, participation in movements for change such as *Make Poverty History* and *livesimply* are expressions of their faith and charity in action, similar to a commitment to prayer and providing financial support for charities. Rather than being other-worldly Christians are often at the forefront of movements for social change, because love of God and love of thy neighbour are indivisible.

Charity, for Christians, is not a demeaning hand-out; it is a vibrant expression of love.

MUSIC: Edward Elgar – Cello Concerto, Opus 85 (10:39)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXOtdAip4bM&list=RDPXOtdAip4bM&start_radio=1



AFFIRMATION – 240 (said, not sung) purple book

RETIRING COLLECTION PRAYER

This church is sustained by what we are able to bring to it:

Our time and our energy,

Our love and our resources.

This morning collection will be gratefully received to support the work of this congregation, immediately after the service.

POETRY

Charity Is like an Unsung Anthem

***Charity is like an unsung anthem
Harmonizing everything we see.
A gift can be a work of silent witness,
Remembrance, reverence, unsought forgiveness,
Intention, labor, time, philanthropy.
The worth is measured only by redemption,
Yielding nothing but the grace to be.***

Charity Should Make the Giver Sin

***Charity should make the giver sing,
Happy in the undertow of sharing.
A gift should not be given out of duty,
Remiss in both its pleasure and its beauty,
Intent on rectitude, bereft of caring.
The burdens of the world may be worth bearing,
Yet gifts should still a certain lightness bring.***

A turn of the screw

There was an industrialist whose production line inexplicably breaks down, costing him millions per day. He finally tracks down an expert who takes out a screwdriver, turns one screw, and then - as the factory cranks back to life - presents a bill for £10,000.

Affronted, the factory owner demands an itemised version. The expert is happy to oblige: "For turning a screw: £1. For knowing which screw to turn: £9,999."

Author: Oliver Burkeman in "The Guardian Weekend", 13 August 2011

HYMN 10 – Be that guide whom love sustains (purple book)

CLOSING WORDS

We are blessed with an abundance of good things for which we are truly thankful, as long as we remember them.

We are privileged with great freedom and power, for which in return we act with responsibility.

We are lucky to have shared this time and space together, because we are lucky to have each other.

May the spirit of this place and these friends go with us into the busy city!

MUSIC: Alexander Glazunov – The Seasons, Opus 67, 'Autumn', 'Bacchanale' and 'Petit Adagio' (03:06)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dum-2EKDBtY&list=RDdum-2EKDBtY&start_radio=1

