

Fair Exchange

Exchange is a very broad concept and permeates everything we do. Communication is an exchange of ideas expressed in words. Money is a medium for exchange, based on an arbitrary value system. Money represents a value; in itself it has no intrinsic worth. The value of money changes with the variable values of marketable commodities, according to the law of supply and demand.

All relationships have their basis in exchange. I give you something; you give me something in return. This does not have to be objects or money. It can be as simple as: I smile at you, you smile back. I love you, you love me. These are fundamental exchanges between two people. They actually are exchanging Dynamis, the energy of life itself. When the exchange is appropriate and compatible, each person feels in some way increased by the exchange. When the exchange is inappropriate or incompatible, both feel decreased by the interaction. It is a question of equity, of fair exchange.

Every Being has an innate sense of fairness, of the even balance of the scales of justice. We know instinctively when someone unbalances the scale in a relationship with us, and we equally instinctively resent it. Deep down inside, we also know when we are receiving more than we are giving. It makes us uncomfortable and also disempowers us.

Thieves and parasites disgust us because of our inherent sense that they are unbalancing the scales, with their desire to live off the creations, productivity or life force of others.

The most basic of all exchanges is the exchange of Dynamis. Even though Dynamis flows from us in an unending stream of creation, not everyone has equal volume, purity and quality. This causes imbalances. The exchange can be unbalanced. In any relationship a balance is essential for harmony and happiness. In a marriage, or in a family where the interaction is so close, the balance becomes of tremendous importance.

When one partner is giving a large amount of Dynamis, of love and creation, and the other is not, the relationship is unbalanced. It is like a partnership where one person does all the work and the other reads the newspaper or plays computer games all day. Resentment and disharmony is sure to follow.

In many marriages money becomes a bone of contention. How to budget? Where to spend the hard earned dollar? How to allocate the funds? Who earned the money, who should say where it is spent? Really this is a symptom of unbalanced exchange at a much more basic level. Fair exchange is whatever the individuals agree it to be. So one partner could be the bread winner while the other takes care of the household. Or one takes care of the cars and external affairs, while the other takes care of the cooking. As long as both parties are happy with this, there is a fair exchange. There is an alignment of duties and responsibilities towards the goal of mutual survival as a team.

Attention is the coin, the gold standard of communication. In order to communicate with someone it is necessary to give them your attention. To listen to someone's communication one has to pay attention. Notice I say PAY attention. Dynamis flows along the line of attention. As Beings we consider attention of extreme value. It is spiritual gold. We pay each other with units of attention. Some individuals try to hog the attention, and we usually resent them for it, especially if their method of getting the attention is unpleasant. They want more than their fair share.

It has often been considered that masculine energy is an outflow (aggressive) and feminine an inflow (passive). This would mean the man did all the talking and giving and the woman all the listening and receiving. Instant imbalance!

A relationship requires communication. This means we need to be able to speak our thoughts and to listen to the other person as well. When a relationship becomes a monologue where one speaks and the other may not answer, or cannot get a word in edgewise, this violates the laws of exchange which most particularly do apply to communication. Equally, when one talks and the other will not listen, the scale of exchange unbalances. Most of us choose our relationships in the first place because we are getting enough of the type of attention which we desire, from a person whose Dynamis is compatible with our own. When the attention wanes, the relationship becomes less satisfying. We are not being paid our attention coins.

Admiration, which is a strong component of love, is the most desired form of attention. We bask in it when we know we earned or deserved it. I call it the "admiration cookie". When we do something fine, we expect our cookie. We dress, not to impress, but to get our "admiration cookie". This is especially important in a marriage or close relationship. When our spouse does not give us the cookies which we feel we have earned, most of us sulk. Again, the scales of exchange have tipped. We feel cheated, our payment, our spiritual food stamps are not forthcoming. We cook a wonderful meal, by God we want our just desserts! We plan a garden, slay a dragon, lose ten pounds, or swing the deal of the century, then, if our "admiration cookies" are not right there when we expect them, you can expect Armageddon immediately. It wounds us deeply, we feel unappreciated, unrecognized and unloved.

When one partner is flowing concern and love and gets nagging and strife in return, the balance is even more unequal. It is like spending gold coin and receiving a small and rotten apple in exchange. Every Being alive wants a fair exchange in his life, whether he realizes it at the time or not. We instantly feel outrage when we do not get a fair exchange for our money. It is the same way with spiritual coin. When we take more than we deserve, we feel a lessening of pride. When we give more than the recipient merits, we damage their pride and independence. When someone gives us diamonds, whether material or spiritual, and we give them grief in return, it diminishes both parties. Relationships often founder on this exact point. Usually the person who gives the diamonds tries harder and harder, throwing more and more coins into this deep pit. This is an error. The balance needs to be established and the rules of exchange defined for the relationship.

As it does in any form of exchange, what the exchange in a marriage is depends on the commodity one wishes to receive in exchange for one's precious coin. Unlike in the business world where the exchanges are more solid, often the exchanges in a relationship are spiritual or intangible. Who can set a physical price on a serene household? Or the shoulder that is always there to lean on when the going gets tough? The unquestionable loyalty, the security that comes with knowing there is at least one person in the universe who is firmly in your corner? These are gifts beyond price. Yet there is still an exchange required. No-one wishes to give loyalty or love without receiving it back in full measure.

There is an old saying that "One needs to give what one most desires to receive." This is especially appropriate in the area of love. I was completely charmed by the Mexican song that starts"

"Love isn't love until you give it away . . ."

However, one can take that a little too far, cherishing a scoundrel, giving one's devotion to someone who does not reciprocate, attempting to reform hard core criminals with one's love, these fall in the general category of casting pearls before swine. You get muddy and the pig, who cannot eat the pearls, will certainly not appreciate them.

When I was a teenager, I was rather shy. I greatly admired my Grandmother's ability to start up a conversation with anyone, anywhere, at any time. I did not feel quite up to that, so I started a smile campaign. I smiled and said "Good Morning" to everyone I met on my way to work that morning. The results were interesting. Some smiled back. Some ignored me. Some said "Good Morning" with no smile, some returned my greeting with a smile of their own. I found myself elated by the cheery replies and quite downcast at the ones who didn't even acknowledge my communication. Undaunted, next morning on the bus I repeated my procedure. More people answered me with a smile. There were a few hard cases. Next day I spoke to those I remembered from the previous days with a louder greeting, just in case they were deaf. I continued to greet everyone else as usual. By the end of the week I had started a fashion on the 8:30 AM bus. Almost everyone was greeting, not just me, but each other. The slightly grumpy morning commuter attitude was transformed. I felt much better, nowhere near as shy and withdrawn. A nice exchange. Simple and satisfying!

Couples usually find their lives become complicated once they add children into the marriage equation. Children require many things, the first of which is attention. A baby needs lots of attention. The husband, who is generally accustomed to being showered with attention, now finds himself in the back seat. If he is not a good communicator, he doesn't mention his unhappiness. The wife, who is slightly harried dealing with her new tasks, fails to notice his discomfort, he sulks louder. He expects her to notice; he is used to the sun rising and setting on his needs. He feels abandoned and neglected. It wounds him. This really is an unnecessary soul wound. He needs to be included in the action, to have a position wherein he can contribute to the handling of the new addition and thus free up some time and attention which can then be spent on each other.

Children give us joy and hope for the future. In exchange, we give them protection, love and education, so that they can fulfill that future. When we unbalance the exchange by giving a child too much "stuff" for which he has no exchange, we disempower him and wind him up with a sense of obligation, a debt that he cannot discharge. We have just taught the child a very poor lesson. Children are finding their way in a turbulent sea. Teaching them fair exchange is a lesson that will help them steer their boat throughout their lives. Teaching them unfair exchange will tend to make them rudderless. Working towards and accomplishing a goal is one of the greatest pleasures of life. We also value most those things which we have acquired by our own efforts.

An examination of the various areas of one's life and the people in it in relation to the law of exchange can be quite enlightening.

You take a pad of paper and write down the various relationships, groups and projects in which you are involved. Then taking each one in turn, write down what it give to you and what you give to it.

You will find the problematic areas, or people, uniformly have an imbalance of exchange, either giving or taking too much.

On those areas where your own exchange is inadequate, you can then plan how to balance the scales to make the exchange fair and so recover your personal pride.

On those areas where others individually, or as a group, have an unfair exchange with you, it is advisable to address this with the individual or group as soon as you notice it and to require the exchange to be balanced.

I should note here, that when you allow a person to continually take more than their fair exchange, that person will become critical and hostile towards you. The mechanism of justification kicks in and they have to attempt to excuse their misdeeds. This usually involved degrading you. When someone commits acts which they know are harmful, the mechanism of justification dictates that they then attempt to blame or criticize the person they have harmed. Rather than look at their own failings and act of negligence or directly harmful effects, the individual attempts to direct the attention to what other people are doing, most especially the one that was harmed. Naturally, this stops when the individual takes a good look at what he or she is doing and corrects it.

These perpetrations against the laws of exchange, when allowed to continue, do a person no favors. In fact they are harmful to all involved.