



Why Give More than We Take?

We work our whole life to acquire things. Yet, when our physical being perishes we go empty handed. I guess that is what drives many of us to believe in an afterlife. When we die our legacy in this life becomes the yardstick we are measured by.

Most of us hope our legacy includes being remembered as a giving person. My concept of a giving person is one who contributes more to society than they take. Undoubtedly, this is an imprecise definition, open to interpretation. “She was a giving person”, “He gave all of himself to the cause” or similar phrases are frequently used when people are being eulogized. To give something implies, we acquired or control whatever it is we are giving. Acquiring is pretty close to taking even if there is some type of exchange for it. Is “giving and taking” simply a zero-sum game?

This month I was reading an article from The Economist, “Why the 20%, and Not the 1% are the Real Problem”. The story outlines how the wealthiest upper 20% of Americans are looking out for themselves and their families, not the rest of our citizens. The author claims the meritocracy that defines capitalism in the United States is creating two tiers, the haves and have nots. The word meritocracy implies “I worked hard to get it, I earned it and I deserve it.” I am not sure the writer intended this, but one key idea that comes through in the article is that the upper 20% are takers not givers.

Let’s explore two questions:

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