

'Tis the Season for Giving—of Yourself

by Kathryn Amenta

I noticed that holiday decorations were already on sale in my grocery store the day after Halloween. Is it my imagination, or does one holiday just seem to blur into the next from October to January? There's hardly enough time to focus on each holiday, let alone manage your holiday spending budget. So this year, I sat myself down to think before I leap into the shopping frenzy.

The spirit of giving—that's what the holidays are about. Like most people, I accept this as truth. But I stop short of the retail message that suggests my value as a giver lies in the amount of money I spend, or charge. You see, I've re-programmed my thinking from the spirit of giving lavish gifts (that I can't afford) to ***the spirit of giving of myself.***

When we focus on giving lavish gifts to others that we can't afford, we often compromise important needs in our lives—healthy food, medical care and medications, safe auto and home, health club, to name a few. We also spend months (or years) repaying debt we incur, which further compromises our ability to meet our true needs. Inevitably, we reinforce the self-talk that we are worth less than the money we can spend on others. (If we have children in our care, think of the message we are sending them.)

Giving of myself does not compromise my ability to meet my needs; in fact, it better serves my need for connecting with the people important in my life. So, I've started focusing on crafts and other gifts that enable me to self-express and give of my most precious gift—my time.

If following the latest Martha Stewart lead is not your bag, there are many, many alternatives. Prepare, wrap and freeze a meal for a busy person. Enclose child care coupons in a gift card for people with children. Assemble a list of inspirational quotes or a reading list of your most memorable books (and why you enjoyed each) and print these on festive paper. Give a pledge to dine together at a favorite restaurant or in your home. The possibilities are endless—so start your creative juices flowing. (Caution: make sure that money you spend on craft materials doesn't exceed your budget too!)

Remember, ***the true power of giving is connecting with special people.*** And, it is okay to spend money on them, as long as you don't deprive your needs. Just consider that there are countless other ways to connect and demonstrate that you care.

Have fun and enjoy the holidays.

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