

The Gifting is on...ready, set, go!

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By Renuka Baron

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Can you remember the favorite gift you received from all past Christmases? Think about that for a few seconds. What gift inspired and excited you the most? Try to remember how old you were and the giver of the gift. Imagine how it must have felt as that person watched you open this present.

Well, the gifting season has already begun in the western world. If you have young children, you may have already noticed the television advertisements creating the must-have-toy frenzy. If you are in relationship, you may have pondered about the special gift that will light up your beloved's eyes. Regardless of your personal and social circles, the pressure is on. The pressure of purchasing, of dressing more elegantly, of entertaining, of attending social events.

But the heaviest pressure is felt in the wallet. For those of you who enjoy paying with plastic, you can delay the stress until January statements. Why does this season, that is supposedly about spreading joy and good will in the world, have to be so expensive?

For many people, it ends up not feeling so joyous because the pressure of buying the right gift outweighs the pleasure of giving from the heart. When you give from your pocketbook you share your earnings. When you give from the heart, you share a piece of who you really are.

Think about the people you are going to be giving obligatory gifts to this holiday season. These folks include relatives, acquaintances or colleagues who gave you something last year, friends that you are in the habit of giving to. Is it possible that you are so in need of being liked/loved and being seen as a nice person that you are willing to buy this/these feelings with a gift? There is an easy way to find out. First, make two columns on a piece of paper. Label one column "have to", and the other "want to".

Now, write down the names of the people you want to give to and the names of the people you have to give to in the appropriate columns. Now, you actually have to get your heart involved and look at each name and then beside that name write down the feeling you think you would have from gifting that individual. If you don't think you would feel joy in giving, then I suggest you don't. It probably won't be appreciated.

You can even go a step further and write down the amount of funds you would be willing to spend in the "have to" column and use that money for something that you really want. For example, I was brought up in a home where preparing a meal for some else was a form of expressing love and generosity. So, when I give somebody food I have labored over, it is an extension of my love. Since I don't know anyone in my circle that is desperate for my cooking, last year I decided to share my

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form of love with people I don't know. With help from my husband and sons, I made several cartons of bagged lunches and took them to the streets in our city where the homeless sleep. I handed each bag personally. A couple of people refused my "love" but the rest were very happy to have a meal which wasn't fished out of the dumpsters. It was so amazingly joyous to give from my heart. I don't know if I have ever felt the same way when I have received a gift, and I have gotten some fantastic gifts in my lifetime.

If somebody could give you any gift on this planet, what would you want? Who would you want it from? How much would it cost? How would you feel when you received it? What is stopping you from having this gift? If your last answer is money, then I suggest you might be wanting the wrong thing.

My challenge this season to you is whatever and whomever to choose to give to, share a piece of yourself and give from the heart. If you write cards, include more than just your name. Most

importantly, whoever you choose to spend your time with, speak a little gentler, hug a little longer and tighter, smile a little wider, laugh a little louder, dance a little more openly, and love a lot more generously. Don't hide your love, share it. It is worth more than anything you could buy in a store. Love not shared is love not known. May the God of your understanding shine brightly on you. Have a blessed season!

Renuka authors a column called Renuka's Reality Check at www.IgniteYourSoul.com

A Prophet is Rarely Recognized in His Own Family

By Laurel Aiyana

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Spiritual gifts are still looked upon by far too many in the world with some reservation, more so in Western civilization. Such is the case in my family. Raised Catholic, my parents believed in the Augustinian theory of cessation of the gifts after the days of Jesus and his apostles shortly after his death. At age 36, I was born again, and departed from Catholicism for empowered Evangelicals. As with Jesus, whose own brothers, at first anyway, thought He was a nut. My own family treated me like an outcast, regularly mock me, and don't value my spiritual gifting.

Spiritual gifts are blessings from God to be used to bless others as an instrument of the Lord. My gifting is more in healing and intercessory work, but in working within these gifts, the Lord will give me prophecy to share with people. I pray for increased spiritual gifts as a regular part of my prayers.

Gradually, as members of my family have come to the Lord, these people have come to embrace me for who I am. Jesus' brother James was thought to be the author of the book of James in the bible. One saved member does infect the rest of the body. I keep prayer that it further infects my own family, but some of the hearts have been difficult to penetrate. They won't outrun my prayers though. God can penetrate the hardest hearts. He got through to me, and my hide was pretty thick.

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As I've grown in spiritual maturity, I have learned to forgive my persecutors, even those in my family for all the poisoned darts that flung my way. They far more easily roll off my back. I take suffering for my faith as a sign that I'm on track spiritually. The devil doesn't need to attack those he already calls his own. The harder the attack, the better I must be doing. That thought gets me through the hard times. I know blessings must be over the next hill, or I'm ready to come up to a new spiritual level. As many preachers say, "new level, new devil." How true that phrase is. I want to thank everyone who persecuted me. You've made me that much stronger in the Lord, as for a while, He was all I had, and He is my sufficiency.

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At age 41, I have begun the process of reinventing myself, and follow my life-long passion to write. For years, I held what I thought was the responsible job as an IT administrator to pay the bills, but I sacrificed a piece of my soul. Now I hope to fulfill my real dream.



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