

Giving of My Clown Heart -- Shobi Dobi

In our western modern society, we are so caught up in things and most of the rest of the world that may not have as many “things,” sees us, and wants “things” too. But what is it we clowns really want to give away and share with the rest of the world?

I remember walking down a dirt road with an 8 year old boy in India who was describing himself to me as “poor.” I asked him “Why don’t you consider me poor?” He thought and replied “You have a watch.” In fact, I rarely wear a watch. So I said, “I don’t have a watch, am I poor?” He looked down at the road at his barefoot and then at my feet. “You have shoes” It was really hot - 112°F. I would have been barefoot, but my feet are “soft.” So I said, “If I give you my shoes will that make you rich?”. He kept up with me as we walked the 20 minutes into town. We discovered that he was richer than me, because his mother and father were alive, and he had six brothers and sisters whom he loved, and in back of his house he had a beautiful mango tree.

I worked as an art therapist at a Children’s Home many years ago in New York City. At Christmas time they would get so many toys and yet it was never enough. Things are never enough because things do not fill a void in the heart.

When we go to an economically depressed country, we can do these people and our own countries a disservice if we just give “things.” I’m not speaking of “aid” as food and medical supplies, but trinkets - what we clowns call “give-aways”

Setting up the Give-Me’s in a Crowd

On our China trip, Patch commented “When you start giving away things you become a vendor.” I call it the “give-me’s.” Giving away trinkets in a crowd is actually dangerous. In a mob, a frantic “Give me” demand can set you up to get mobbed. It is something that every professional clown has run across. This is especially true in areas of economic depression. When I was in India, I was very successful in blowing up those latex gloves and bouncing them around clinics. The mistake I made was trying this outside the clinic environment. When everyone heard I was giving them away, in seconds I had 30 hands in my face - in my face! “Give me one!” “I didn’t get one!” “Over here!” “I need one for my sister, please” “please” and more “please.”

How often do you go somewhere in clown and the first thing the children will say is, “Can I have a balloon?” It is not always the clown who creates this pattern. On the Afghan Trip, Lanky (Danny Kollaja) said that there were always people at the fence in front of the “clown house” with their hands out begging. One day he saw the reason why. The non clown members of the group were giving away money! We are responsible for establishing this pattern of giving. When we go as ambassador clowns we do all clowns a disservice when we create a “give-me” atmosphere. By giving material things away, I am not giving away what I really have to offer - my clown heart.

Destroying a playful environment.

Once in China we clowns were all playing in a school in individual classrooms. We were having such fun interacting with the staff and children as “teachers.” Then one clown - yes it only takes one - started giving away autographs. All the kids stopped playing and just ran around collecting autographs. “I don’t give those out” I

said and I was ignored from then on as if I was wearing skunk oil. The fun ended, the interaction ended. And the serious collecting of “things” started. We all left the school. When you rely on the thing to make the connection, it is a shallow connection.

I saw this happen over and over again. It was very obvious one day in China when our bus broke down on a country road on the way to the Great Wall. We had a street carnival going with everyone playing until someone started making balloon animals. It was amazing to see the atmosphere change. All the little Chinese children very dutifully lined up. The “carnival atmosphere” ended with several clowns fanatically making balloon animals for every child. We do understand that everyone should get one, because we are trained in a democratic way, but we miss the point. Our clown presence is a gift in itself, our clown play is an exceptional gift.

The Play Is the Thing

If play is not in the formula of the giving for the clown, we are not giving out best gift. The best gift we can give is our silly non-tangible clown self. When practicing what some Ambassador Clowns call “Aggressive Love,” if play is not in the works, the action become hostile and really aggressive. Shobi learned this aggressive love on Patch’s China trip. She runs into a crowd and hugs everyone or walks directly into the kitchen of a restaurant and hugs the cook. It is a lot of fun, BUT as soon as the play is not mutually playful, she retreats. The play is what allows us to step over boundaries, but play is not only what makes it work, it is what gets the point across.

A Token from the Heart.

A little trinket given from the heart in a one-on-one situation is quite a different situation. A patient in ICU said to me once, “Can you give me something to remember you by?” It was not a demand or even a plea, but a request. Mutual respect was definitely in the formula. When we have give-aways in the hospital, it is just a token of our love and respect. But what we give is more than that. Our intention is to empower, to give hope and to spread joy. For the clown Love is the force, play is vehicle and joy is the result.

Giving Self Respect

What if I had given the little boy on that dusty Indian street a plastic ring. He would have smiled and maybe put it in a special place. “Look what the clown gave me!” But I gave him something more. I gave him self respect. Self respect is difficult to give. But it is part of the hope we are aiming to engender as caring clowns as ambassador clowns. We can give respect by the way we treat people - by our unconditional love.

One clown said to me “Well, I give away my things unconditionally. I don’t want anything in return.” Really? Don’t we want to be “good” people. Good people help each other. As we have discussed before. Helping is a way of saying something is wrong that needs to be fixed. It implies “I am going to fix it.” What does giving away trinkets fix? We are trying to fix, but are we serving the situation? We are trying to help, when we are help itself! Our mere presence in war torn, economically depressed, devastated or stressful arenas is the message. Our clown presence is healing, empowering, and uplifting. We don’t need to stand and pass out trinkets, and forget to play, interact and connect. We can stand tall say, “I am enough,” and pass out love!