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EDUCATION FOR CHARITY: A SPIRITUAL VISITATION



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As we enter the season of year-end giving, Richard Gunderman helps us reflect on what we might learn about giving from revisiting the Charles Dickens' seasonal classic, A Christmas Carol. Originally published in 1843 the novella still speaks to readers, theater-goers, and viewers of the many film versions of Ebenezer Scrooge's story.

If the goal is to get ourselves to share with others some of our time, talent, or treasure, several alternatives present themselves. One is to hold guns to heads, and threaten to pull the trigger if potential givers do not hand it over. That, however, is not charity but robbery. The fact that the people with the guns do not profit personally, that they are functioning as latter-day Robin Hoods, affords no excuse. Another alternative is to threaten potential givers with civil and even criminal sanctions, including fines and imprisonment. That, however, is not charity but taxation. Where genuine charity is concerned, the fact that the revenues are part of a legislated social welfare program adds no moral luster to the act, and the moral excellence of generosity is not realized merely by paying taxes in a social welfare state. It is also possible to entice potential givers with various kinds of awards, or even financial incentives. That, however, is not charity but commerce. People who give in order to get something for themselves are not really giving but engaging in a commercial transaction.

We may coerce, threaten, or even bribe people to give, but when it comes to genuine charity, education and persuasion are the only means available. Charity, like every other human excellence, must be voluntary. We must know what we are doing, and we must choose it for the sake of the person or people we are endeavoring to aid. Charitable acts must flow from a sincere interest in others' welfare and a desire to enrich their lives. Just as the excellence of charity cannot be compelled, it cannot be accidental, either. At best, it is a weak form of charity if I leave \$20 on the tabletop and someone else happens to pick it up, even if the individual is in a state of dire need. To be sure, we need not always know the particular person or people we are helping. We may not know the names and faces of the future recipients of a scholarship fund we establish. Yet we need a clear idea of what recipients need, such as food, housing, or education, and how the opportunity we are providing is intended to enrich their lives.

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It is equally important that such acts arise from a charitable character. Every act of charity is good in itself, but it is especially admirable when it flows directly from the charitable disposition of the giver. A day in which we have acted charitably but once is better than a day in which we have not acted charitably at all, but charity is about more than the transfer of resources. It is about bringing to full fruition the human potential for moral excellence. Even an unskilled performer may occasionally strike the ball or the note soundly, but the real beauty lies in striking well on a consistent basis, because only then do we really know what we are doing. The moral life is as much about being as about doing. We wish less to act charitably, in the sense of acting as if we were charitable, than to express truly charitable character through action. There is a sense in which we learn to be charitable by acting charitably, but our ultimate goal is not to pretend to virtues we don't have but truly to have them.

Aptitudes, temperaments, and interests differ from person to person. Some have a leg up on others when it comes to a natural disposition to charity. Yet charity is not purely natural, and it can be powerfully influenced by the manner in which we are reared, educated, and habituated. If our parents delight in charity, there is a greater chance that our own charitable inclinations will be developed and expressed. The same is true if we receive an education that helps us understand the nature of charity and the important difference charitable acts can make in the lives of recipients and givers. Emulation can exert great influence. If my friends are charitable and devote themselves to charitable works, then I am more likely to do so myself.

Charity is an important ingredient in the recipe for a full human life. The good among us assay lives largely according to the contribution made to others. It is only when we have become genuinely charitable that we fully understand what we have to contribute.

People who exhibit no interest in charity, and who are not engaged in fostering it, are missing an important element of life. They may be oblivious to others' needs, or they may suppose that life is all about accumulating for self. They may even be rich in material terms. But the moral dimension of their lives is necessarily impoverished. The inability to part with what we have and to share our best with others represents a moral failing. Because education is one of the only means of developing charity, and because no life can be complete without it, we neglect the topic of education for charity at our own substantial peril.

How can we educate for charity? How can we help those we care most about, including our children and grandchildren, realize their full charitable potential? To begin with, we might ask them to participate in charitable works. We might encourage them to keep company with charitable people. We might even invite them to read philosophical, theological, and literary works that explore charity. Some of these works might include biographies and novels depicting charity at its best. Among such works we might include the Gospel of Luke, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Such works offer not only insight but inspiration. In the interest of understanding the vice as well as the virtue associated with charity, we might also choose works that show the lack of charity at its worst, through portraits of misers and misanthropes, as beautifully revealed in the works of Machiavelli, Swift, and Moliere.

We might also explore the human ascent from the pit of avarice to the heights of charity. Such a transformation is beautifully portrayed in one of the best-known stories of modern times, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, a story so powerful it has become a myth for us. First published in 1843, the novella tells the tale of businessman Ebenezer Scrooge, who represents an absolute antithesis of charity. In Scrooge, whose name has en-

tered our lexicon as a synonym for miser, we behold the meanness, pettiness, and ultimate absurdity of the hoarder's life. We also witness his transformation from a misanthrope into a truly charitable human being. As events unfold, he ceases regarding other people as threats to be defended against or idiots whose needs and appetites can be exploited for personal gain. Instead he discovers in them opportunities to give and to make the most of what he has to contribute. If we cannot force people to be charitable, and must instead rely on their own volition, what insights does Dickens offer into how such a transformation can be effected?

We first meet Scrooge on Christmas Eve, the anniversary of the death of his business partner and moral alter ego, Jacob Marley. Scrooge is described as a “scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner,” “hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire.” His path in life has been a solitary one, with no interest or sympathy for others. When his nephew Fred visits Scrooge's office and, moved by the spirit of Christmas, invites him to be his guest for the holiday, Scrooge remarks that the younger man can have nothing to celebrate, for he is short of money. The nephew says that Christmas is a time when people recognize their shared humanity and “open their shut-up hearts freely.” Scrooge is unmoved. Seeing no profit in it, he would prefer to spend the day alone.

Then Scrooge is visited by two charity workers, who ask him to contribute to a collection for the poor and destitute. Scrooge asks whether the prisons, workhouses, and poor laws are still in operation. Assured that they are, he responds that he intends to contribute nothing. “I help to support the establishments I have mentioned,” and they “cost enough.” The charity workers reply that many would rather die than go there. To which Scrooge replies, “If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the

surplus population.” The fortunes of others are no concern of his. “It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's.” The charity workers withdraw, and Scrooge turns to his threadbare clerk, Bob Cratchit, whose labors in Scrooge's office barely support his large family. Scrooge expresses great resentment that Cratchit expects to get Christmas day off with pay. To Scrooge, it feels as though his pocket is being picked. The very idea that anyone would give away something for nothing is not only highly objectionable but essentially incomprehensible to him. To a greedy soul, the giving of gifts simply makes no sense.

That night, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his dead partner. Marley drags heavy chains made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses. “I wear the chain I forged in life,” cries the ghost, a chain not so different from the one that Scrooge is forging for himself. The ghost describes his existence as an “incessant torture of remorse,” yet “no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused.” Scrooge is perplexed: “But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.” The ghost thunders, “Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business.” The ghost is hinting at a new business model, one that subordinates the making of a living to the making of a life. It is a model not transactional but transformational, measured not by what we accumulate but by what we contribute.

Marley's ghost warns Scrooge that he has a chance of escaping his own bitter fate. Scrooge is to be visited by three spirits, without whom he has no hope of avoiding the path the ghost of his partner now treads. These spirits are the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Each enables Scrooge to see his life and the lives of

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others from a new perspective. They do not bombard him with commandments or threaten him with punishments. They simply enable him to see what his life once was, what it has become, and what it will look like if its trajectory is traced out to the end. In other words, they enable him to look at his life anew, with a long sense of time, and these new vantage points prove morally transformative.

When the Ghost of Christmas Past arrives, the terrified Scrooge is quaking in bed, hiding behind the curtains. When the curtains are drawn aside, he finds himself face to face with his unearthly visitor, drawn, as the narrative has it, “as close . . . as I am now to you, and I am standing at the spirit of your elbow.” As Scrooge is being visited by spirits, the narrator implies, so too spirits are drawing close to us. As Scrooge will be made to follow Socrates’ injunction and examine his own life, so we, by accompanying Scrooge and the spirits, will be pressed to reexamine our own. To fully understand our earthly affairs, the story suggests, we must inspect our lives from a spiritual perspective. Viewed from a purely worldly point of view, no transformation is possible. Through the good graces of the Ghost of Christmas Past, however, Scrooge is afforded the opportunity to read his own biography, to see his life story up to this point retold in a single night. Though the moving finger has writ and moved on, there is still hope. In seeing again what he has lost, what he in fact gave up of his own volition, Scrooge will realize that he can choose a different path. So, too, perhaps, can we.

The Spirit reaches out to Scrooge, leading him toward the window. Scrooge protests, “I am a mortal, and liable to fall.” “Bear but a touch of my hand *there*,” says the Spirit, laying his hand upon Scrooge’s heart, “and you shall be upheld in more than this!” Scrooge is afraid of falling, but he has been exposed all his life to a quite different sort of fall, not a hypothetical fall that might yet land him on

the ground, but a moral fall that has been taking place for many years. It is not the sort of fall that breaks the ankle or the elbow, but the kind that breaks the spirit. To know what he has lost, and to realize that the loss has been of his own making, Scrooge must witness it firsthand, through a kind of time-lapse photography. Only this perspective can enable him to appreciate changes so gradual that they are otherwise undetectable. He must see from a larger perspective, not day-to-day but year-to-year and decade-to-decade what he has made of his life. Only in seeing how he was once capable of open-hearted joy can he appraise his reduction to a shut-in, loveless old man. It is a fall that breaks not his bones but his heart.

The Spirit takes Scrooge to his old school, where he sees boys in great spirits, shouting to one another and wishing each other a merry Christmas. One solitary child remains in the school, neglected by his friends. Scrooge begins to weep. “What is the matter?” asks the Spirit. “Nothing,” says Scrooge. “There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that’s all.” Then he sees himself grown older, but still left alone by the other boys during the holidays. A little girl, his sister, bursts into the room and announces that she has come to fetch him. Scrooge is to come home for good, for his father is grown “much kinder than he used to be.” Scrooge’s father has changed, and changed in such a way that he now wants his son home for Christmas. Even a Scrooge can change. How was such a transformation effected? The story does not say, at least not directly. Perhaps Ebenezer is not the first Scrooge to receive a spiritual visitation.

Beholding this scene, Scrooge is reminded what a delicate creature his sister had always been, though “she had a large heart,” as the spirit says. “So she had!” cried Scrooge. The Spirit adds, “She died a woman, and had, as I think, children.” “One child,” Scrooge cor-

rects. “True,” says the ghost. “Your nephew!” Some peoples’ hearts continue beating for many a year, and others’ cease before their time. Scrooge’s sister was a fragile yet large-hearted creature, whose spirit lives on in her only son, Fred. This is the very nephew whom Scrooge treated so cold-heartedly, whose kind-hearted invitation to celebrate the holidays together he had so meanly rebuffed, that very same day. We are invited to glimpse what Scrooge has missed, that his sister’s generosity lives on through her son, and that his entreaties, like those of his mother, are summoning Ebenezer home to the true Spirit of Christmas.

Next they visit the site of the young Scrooge’s apprenticeship and the home of his old boss, Fezziwig. It is Christmas Eve, and Fezziwig insists that they cease working and gather at his home to celebrate the holiday. At the party, Fezziwig and his wife prove to be the very embodiment of Christmas spirit, offering a banquet of plenty and cheerfully leading the assembled guests in merry dances. The Spirit urges Scrooge to listen as the two apprentices praise their boss. He then remarks, “He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?” Scrooge leaps to his former master’s defense: “His power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count them up: what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.” The ghost inquires why Scrooge looks troubled. “I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That’s all.” It seems that we cannot assay the worth of a party, or for that matter any gift, by the amount of money spent on it. The Fezziwigs are sharing something non-fungible, yet which even Scrooge recognizes as quite valuable, with their guests. They are enriching not their purses but their spirits, showing them the true meaning of holiday festivity.

Next we see Scrooge still older, and noticeably changed. There is now an “eager, greedy,

restless motion in the eye, which shows the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.” Scrooge is speaking with a fair young woman, his betrothed. As they talk, it becomes apparent that she is releasing him from a pledge of marriage. He protests that he does not wish to be released, but she persists. “Why?” he asks. She tells him, “You fear the world too much. . . . I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.” She continues, “If you were free, . . . can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain?” Then Scrooge sees her grown into a woman and mother, tenderly presiding over her young children, who play and laugh with her. Her husband arrives, and the children pick their father’s pockets for the presents he has brought them. Later, the other children off to bed, he sits by the fireside with his wife and daughter.

Beholding this scene, Scrooge sadly marvels that such a creature, “quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life.” Then the husband reports to his wife that he has seen an old friend of hers that very afternoon—Scrooge. “His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe,” he says. Scrooge begs the Spirit to take him away: “Remove me! I cannot bear it!” The Ghost of Christmas Past leaves him.

Scrooge is indeed alone. He sees as he has never seen before that his habit of treating everyone and everything in terms of personal gain has rendered him, and continues rendering him, isolated and loveless. He has no one else. Seeking to protect himself from a hazardous world by amassing wealth, he has landed himself not in a fortress but in a prison, a prison of his own making. He is this prison’s sole inmate, condemned, it seems, to serve out his life sentence in solitary confinement.

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Scrooge is visited next by the Ghost of Christmas Present, a “jolly Giant, glorious to see,” who takes Scrooge on a tour of London on Christmas morning. Like the Ghost’s torch, which resembles a horn of plenty, the city is transformed and full of delights, shops and stores overflowing with delicious treats. Church bells issue the call to worship, and the streets fill with people decked out in their best clothes, their faces shining gaily. The spirit sprinkles blessings from his torch, especially on the poor. They soon arrive at the house of Scrooge’s clerk, Bob Cratchit. In manifesting his generous and hearty nature, the Spirit does not seek out the financially astute or the rich. Quite the opposite, he seems to display a special sympathy for the poor and downtrodden. They enter the Cratchits’ humble abode and observe.

Mrs. Cratchit and the older children prepare Christmas dinner, while the younger ones tear about with anticipation. Bob arrives with Tiny Tim, their disabled youngest son. Bob relates that on their way home, Tiny Tim confided that he hoped people in church had seen him, because he is a cripple, “and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.” In relating this story, Bob’s voice is tremulous. It grows even more so when he adds that Tiny Tim is growing strong and hearty. When the family then gathers for their modest feast, they cheer at the arrival of the main course: “one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!” The Cratchits lead lives of scarcity, but they celebrate the holiday in a spirit of abundance and gratitude. Scrooge, by contrast, possesses in abundance, yet is so tortured by fear and greed that he is unable to celebrate at all.

“God bless us every one,” says Tiny Tim, in his weak voice. His father takes his withered hand in his own, “as if he loved the child, and

wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.” “Spirit,” says Scrooge, “with an interest he had never felt before,” “Tell me if Tiny Tim will live.” “I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved,” replies the Ghost. “If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.” “Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared,” Scrooge exclaims. The Spirit replies, “If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none . . . will find him here.” And then the Spirit adds, in words dripping with bitter irony in Scrooge’s ears, “What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.” Joseph Stalin is said to have once observed: “The death of one man is a tragedy, but the death of 10,000 men is a statistic.” As long as Scrooge sees the poor in the abstract, their lives and deaths mean less to him than the financial figures that fill his ledger books. On beholding a real family and a real child, though, his view of the matter is quite transformed. There is a big difference between poverty and a poor human being, and those who seek to educate for charity need to be mindful of this distinction.

The Spirit says, “It may be that in Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man’s child.” Scrooge is stunned to silence. As he reflects on this, Cratchit calls on his family to drink a toast to Mr. Scrooge. Their possessions are few. Yet they are “happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time.” Scrooge has discovered something about them that he never suspected. First, he has discovered that they have a life. They are not merely “the poor,” but flesh-and-blood human beings, each endowed with a distinctive personality and character, each bearing a set of aspirations. Not only are they real, but in crucial respects they are more real than Scrooge, whose cramped existence exhibits few signs of real life. As the Spirit implies, there is some doubt about Scrooge’s humanity. Our humanity is not in all re-

spects given to us. In some respects, it is an achievement, and it must be earned, and re-earned, every day of our lives.

Next the Spirit takes Scrooge to a place where miners live, then to a lonely lighthouse, then to a ship's crew far out at sea. In every case, each person has a kinder word for the others than on any other day of the year. Everyone shares in the day's festivities. Everyone remembers those from whom he is separated, and he knows that they delight to remember him. Scrooge, by contrast, has no one to remember, and if he has his way, no one will remember him. Now he begins to realize the value of such remembering. When disaster falls, property can be replaced, but memories of the kind contained in photo albums and the like are irreplaceable. They are not merely pricey but priceless, and no one's memories, whether rich or poor, are any more or less precious than anyone else's. In this respect, all human beings are equal, and each is equally dear to God.

Next Scrooge is transported to a festive holiday party at the house of his nephew, Fred. The conversation touches on Scrooge. The guests disparage Scrooge, but Fred has nothing but sympathy for him: "his offences carry their own punishment. . . . He loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldy old office, or his dusty chambers." Consequently, Fred says, "I pity him." Later in the party, the absent Scrooge is made the butt of a joke. Scrooge, who would have preferred to be feared rather than liked, discovers that his greed has made him a laughingstock. He is not respected for his financial good sense. He is ridiculed as an absurdity.

The Spirit then leads Scrooge out to the almshouses, hospitals, and jails, "misery's every refuge." At each stop, if vain man has not barred the Spirit from entry, he leaves his

blessing. When the night is done and the Spirit begins to fade, Scrooge is disturbed by something strange he sees beneath the Spirit's robe. It looks to him like a foot or a claw. Then from the folds of his robe emerge two children, "wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable." Scrooge draws back, appalled. "This boy is Ignorance," the spirit says. "This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom." "Have they no refuge or resource?" cries Scrooge. The Spirit turns on him with biting words: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" The worst distortion of human nature is not Tiny Tim's withered limbs. It is the grotesque spectacle of un-nurtured character, souls warped by ignorance and want. Scrooge has lived out most of his life devoid of understanding, failing to recognize, let alone to attend to, the most urgent human business. Now he is getting an education. Now he is being confronted with the narrowness and superficiality of his own heart.

The third Spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, is black, foreboding, and utterly silent. They travel to the city, where men are discussing a funeral. None of those present knows of anyone who plans to attend, but one offers to do so if a meal is provided. Next the Spirit and Scrooge go to Scrooge's office, but he is not there. Scrooge surmises that in the future he has indeed implemented the change in his life he has been resolving to make. Next they go to a particularly infamous part of the city, where two women and a man arrive with bundles to present to a second man. It becomes apparent that they took the items from a dead man. They tell each other that doing so is no cause for blame since, "Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose." After all, you can't take it with you, and these vultures are attempting to make the most for themselves of what he left behind.

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The assembled surmise that the deceased must have been a “wicked old screw,” since he had no one “to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.” Death is able to dress the greedy with terrors, for greed is its dominion. Of the loved and honored dead, however, death cannot make one feature odious. It is as though death magnifies the features that most characterized the life. After a twisted life ends, it becomes uglier still, but the nobility of the good shines on still more clearly after the life has passed out of them. Though the hand may be cold and the heart stilled, the hand was once open and generous, and the heart was brave and tender. Good deeds spring from such wounds and sow the world with life. The one who lives for himself dies completely, but the one who has lived for others and made a difference in their lives does not utterly vanish.

Later the Spirit takes Scrooge to the Cratchit home. Bob is not home yet, and Mrs. Cratchit remarks that he has been walking slower of late, though “I have known him [to] walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed.” At last Bob arrives, and the two youngest children climb up on his knees, telling their father, “Don’t be grieved.” Bob acts cheerful, but it soon becomes apparent that he has stopped to visit Tiny Tim’s grave: “I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child.” Bob breaks down and must leave the room. Later he tells his family, “I know that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves; nor forget Tiny Tim in doing it.” Though he has died, Tiny Tim lives on in the hearts of his family, above all that of his father. His gentle spirit continues to shine like a beacon of goodness in their lives.

The deaths of the greedy man and Tiny Tim present a remarkable contrast. The greedy

man’s death brings out the worst in people. No one mourns him or pays his memory even a modicum of respect. Instead they make jokes at his expense. His death represents nothing more than an opportunity for self-enrichment through thievery. By contrast, the death of Tiny Tim brings out the best in everyone. In life, he wanted others to see him, so that they might be reminded of one who healed. In death, he memorializes the dignity of the meek, the mild, the weak, and the wounded. The greedy man accumulated much in life, but in death left behind nothing but a few rags. Tiny Tim was small and frail in life, but his memory is a monument of goodness and efforts to bring goodness and happiness to others. The man of greed grew to fear and hate every moment of his life. By contrast, Tiny Tim had developed the excellence of trust.

The Spirit next takes Scrooge to a graveyard. Scrooge begs the Spirit to tell him whether what he has seen are shades of what will be, or shadows of things that merely may be. But the Spirit only points to a neglected grave. Scrooge says to himself, “Men’s courses foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!” But the Spirit remains silent and immovable. Scrooge creeps up to the site, trembling as he advances toward it. On the headstone he reads what he most feared: “Ebenezer Scrooge.” “Spirit,” he pleads, “I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?” He begs again that he may change these shadows. “I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me.” Then he awakes back in his own room.

Why is Scrooge so grateful for what the Spirits have shown him? After all, they have revealed him to be a petty, self-centered, greedy old man, feared, despised, and

laughed at by many and admired and loved by none. Though the visage they reveal is an ugly and regrettable one, Scrooge is grateful because they are showing him the truth about himself. Only in truly knowing himself does he stand any chance of changing his course or enjoy any hope of becoming a better man. The ghosts have made this possible by showing Scrooge who he is, but also by showing him who he has been and who he shall be. Only when he sees his life in this broader temporal perspective is he able to grasp its true significance, to size up his life and see what he is truly amounting to. The Spirits show him his life's silhouette cast against the lives of those who know him. When he sees what he could have contributed and could still contribute to them, he sees it as if for the first time.

Scrooge has put all his faith in tangible things. What he needed was a lesson about intangible things. Life without tangible things may be difficult and even impossible. But merely supplying such needs, even in abundance, does not guarantee a rich life. In fact, coveting such goods excessively excludes the possibility of realizing it. We cannot get even the lower things right unless we seek the higher things. By ignoring and even disparaging the very notion of anything higher than personal gain, Scrooge sentences him-

self to a low life. He is redeemed when the ghosts give him the opportunity to see what he has been missing, the possibility for compassion, forgiveness, and love. Since such excellences are immaterial, insights into them are best delivered through spiritual media. The ghosts show Scrooge that the goods of the heart are every bit as real as the goods of the strongbox. They show him that, by recognizing a part of himself that he had forgotten, and by realizing that he shares it in common with every other human being, his humanity can still be restored. Redemption is still possible. He can still learn charity. And so, by viewing our lives through the lens of Scrooge's story, can each of us.

Achieving extraordinary ends requires extraordinary means. Law is not sufficient. We need narrative, and not just narrative, but myth. And such myth must reach out to us from beyond the worldly, beckoning us to the realm of the spiritual. It must transport us to a thin place, where the worldly and the heavenly are brought into unusually close proximity. When imagination brings us to such a place, a new alchemy becomes possible, opening up new possibilities for human character, understanding, and redemption. Only here, in close proximity to the spiritual, is real education for charity possible.

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