

Written to youth in the juvenile justice centers through *The Beat Within* magazine. Google it.

Dortell Williams  
H-45771 / A5-204  
P.O. Box 4430  
Lancaster, CA 93539

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## GIVING BACK: WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

We hear people talking about giving back. Giving back for what? What if you never had anything to give in the first place? I used to think like that. I didn't understand. I was in a negative headspace and never really stopped to think, or ask anyone, what giving back is all about.

It's really simple when you think about it. It's a community thing. Ants give back in their communities all the time. One ant helps the other and another helps the other and the whole community prospers. They give back to each other, not that one ant owes the other, but because that is how communities work, and grow and come up.

If you've ever been lonely then you understand how important it is to have other people around. Loneliness makes us appreciate having others around. And, if you've ever had anything taken from you then you understand that it is better to contribute than to take from others. When you give, then others around you give, and the next thing you know, everyone is giving to everyone else. That's how ants live. That's how people *should* live.

Since not everyone thinks like this, we have to be smart about who we give to and who we expect to give back to us. We have to be smart about it. Some people will never give back, and that's on them. But it is important to understand that that's the way they are. If we understand them then we know to lower our expectations of them. We become the models and teachers of those kinds.

So what if you don't have anything to give? Well, that's impossible. If you breathe air, you have something to give. Imagine, you give a smile, and someone else smiles back. Something just that small, in an otherwise miserable world, can make a huge difference in someone's day. At school, you have two oranges and your neighbor's is rotten. You give him or her one of the two you have and bam! you just made their day. It's that easy. One of my neighbors doesn't hang out with anyone. He sits on the yard bench and just mulls there. So every now and then, I will go over and start a conversation with him. He responds in kind, we laugh and joke and he doesn't look so sad for a few hours.

Many of us have gifts. We can draw, or rap or play ball real good. When we teach others our

gifts and guide them, that's giving back. It's the same thing as the ants. On a bigger page, surely you've heard of people who give scholarships, help the poor and aid the elderly or sick. That's another way of giving back. Perhaps visiting a hospital with sick kids. Giving back is so simple. I give and you give. You give and I give. Everyone is giving back.

### *Making amends*

Then there's making amends. Have you ever heard of making amends? For those of us who have made bad decisions – decisions that have hurt others – making amends is for us. Making amends is about giving back for what we took. We can take physical things from people, like their wallet, jewels, etc. Or we can take non-physical things like their peace, by scaring them, cursing at them or other inappropriate actions. For these actions, we should make amends. This is how we better ourselves and show that we are ready to be part of the larger community.

There are three ways to make amends. Our amends should begin with an apology specifically naming our wrong. For instance, "I am sorry for yelling at you"; or, "I'm sorry for robbing you." The first type of amends is *direct amends*. This is where you tell the person directly that you apologize, and ask if you can help them or pay them back in some specific way.

Some of us have done *really* bad things and the person isn't around for us to make direct amends. In cases like this, we have to make *indirect amends*. This is where the person we have harmed is not available to us and we improvise to make amends. In cases like this, we learn what we can about the person and make amends by honoring them in a way that is unique to them. For instance, if the person liked dogs, we might volunteer at a dog shelter, or send donations to a dog shelter.

The last of the three types of amends is *living amends*. This is where we demonstrate our change and show a continuous life of helping others and contributing to larger society. Giving back and making amends is what has helped civilization endure for centuries. It works for the ants and it works for us. This is the choice we have. We can be destructive and end civilization, or we can contribute and build society into all the fun and wonderful things we have today: electric cars, cellphones, large farming communities that feed us all, and really cool clotheslines to show our fashion tastes.

I hope you'll join me and not only make amends, but also give back.