

THE REVOLUTION OF THE TOAST

It is not on the news, but there are millions of people looking for a beautiful world to live in. There are also many who make this world a beautiful place, and they are not on the news either. We have experienced the latter this weekend, and this should appear on every newspaper and television news. It will not be so. But it is perfect as well.

We think that money cannot take the center of life. More and more people agree on that. It is not true that the economy is going to manage scarce resources. And people should be at the center of social, economic and political life. So this weekend, we believe we have taken a small step in the beautiful story of the gift economy.

Making history seems to be reserved for just a few. Certainly not for the ordinary people. But this weekend it was different. No doubt these three days will be remembered forever by the more than 200 people who shared a weekend in Alozaina (Málaga, Spain). But it was probably the beginning of something much bigger. It was the third time our dear Emilio Carrillo visited our Shelter Home, and as it happened the previous times, dozens of people came to hear him, perhaps looking for a different world to live in. Listening to him is undoubtedly a call to an internal revolution, but without violence, with no fuss, quietly, living in the present and in the heart of the hurricane of our lives. The hundreds of thousands of people who follow Emilio on Youtube are genuine seekers, who are aware that there is the light of Truth in his words, something which lights up our lives regardless of the hurry, bustling, competitiveness, debts and work duties that surrounds us.

And certainly there is also a lot of Truth in this Shelter Home, where second chances are offered, without anything in return, to people suffering from illnesses, addictions or traumas leading them to the very edge of the abyss. Uniting Emilio's inner revolution with Pepe Bravo's Shelter Home outer revolution is a privilege. Therefore the magical moments arise. But this year it has even gone further. Just a year ago, we were about forty volunteers preparing meals, cleaning tables and floors, and catering to the hundreds of people who came to listen to Emilio. That is a huge boost for the support of this Shelter Home, with hardly no financial support of any kind. But something happened. Something so simple that it would have normally gone unnoticed, but which has become the germ of a small revolution. My wife and I were attending the food tables for Emilio's listeners who had just attended his talk. They left the room touched by his testimony. But with the slow arrival of toasts from kitchen, egos and hunger appeared, and fraternity and sharing seemed to vanish in just a few minutes. A toast in the hand is worth two in the bush. And the better if it was a full plate of them, even though many others had not had any. The spiritual message suddenly disappeared. My wife and I were astonished by the scene. And the same happened with the vegetables sauce, with a bed in a better room or with the sunny garden table. How could that be? How could they have forgotten those messages of brotherhood so soon?

The weekend was a success. But we could not forget that toast for months. Not until we realized that this inconsistency between theory and practice was somehow our fault. With all our best intentions we had arranged a weekend with meals and accommodation at a reasonable price. And we had tried to reconcile the revolution proposed by Emilio with the services of a common hotel or a normal restaurant. And in doing so, we had activated the mercantilist "chip" in all of us. That "chip" that places money in the middle and tries to maximize our benefit. Our guests had paid the price we had requested, and as in any other establishment, they felt entitled to demand and claim the best for the price paid. We had triggered that part of alienation that we live in our hectic lives, and from which we try to escape seeking references for the true meaning of life. Something had to be done. But what?

One day, suddenly, it occurred to us. If we wanted an internal revolution, we should try a revolution on the outside first. And we should promote it from our Shelter Home. A weekend with seekers of new world could be the best platform to try it. If we want to feel ONE with each other, there is no better way than welcoming you as we do so with any good friend at home: opening our doors wide and welcoming the maximum number of people. If mats on the floor were needed to prevent someone from not coming, so we would. What if prices were removed radically? What if we got rid of every meal ticket? What if we avoided the endless process of booking with hundreds of calls to accommodate all our guests? What if we just appealed to the motto "Leave what you can, take what you need"? With such a scheme, we were placing the person at the center of everything, and this would be consistent with what had moved Pepe Bravo to turn his old textile factory into a shelter house, instead of becoming "filthy rich" as many other entrepreneurs had. We would be consistent with the motivations of people like Mariló, Nacha or others, who had left their lives behind to devote themselves to the poor.

But that was a big risk for our mental calculators. What if most of our visitors decided to contribute with nothing or very little? What if we did not even get enough to buy the ingredients for meals? The bank account of the Shelter Home is always "shivering" and this could certainly lead to the suicide of the project. The faces of my partners were a poem when they heard about our proposition. I know that many believed it was a huge risk if not lunacy. But they took a step into the void, and decided to face the challenge of coherence.

We prepared all the details for months: a letter explaining the 180 degree turn in the philosophy of the meeting, a registration form favouring the expression of the conscience of each one, the care process by e-mail, messages during the meeting, routes to see the house ... And the result has not only been positive: it has been magical, extraordinary, exceptional!!! ... For those who are obsessed with numbers, this appeal to conscience has meant more than triple the income from previous years, when we acted under the mercantilist point of view. With those numbers, the Shelter Home may persist for months or even give second vital opportunities for new guests. Three-quarters of the contributions were made prior to the weekend, showing a blind confidence in what we were

proposing, and another quarter in boxes arranged in the House that weekend, guaranteeing the anonymity of donors. Moreover, if that was not enough, many books and crafts were sold, and affiliations as sponsors or partners of the House also tripled.

Not even in the best scenario could we have imagined such a result based on the gift economy approach. All this has to do with the gifts and talents we all cherish. And this weekend, the outpouring of gifts was immense: Emilio with his wisdom and communication skills; our dear Carlos with its logistics talent and beautiful detail of T-shirts, 55 volunteers with their solidarity and their ability to meet our guests, to cook, to clean tables, or to welcome the stranger; and those who visited us, becoming ONE with our Shelter Home.

Many ask: But did anyone avoid paying? Did anybody eat for free? Was not really anyone as demanding as they have been in previous years? We do not really know... or care. We only know that there were people who were able to come despite being unemployed and this latter fact had prevented them from coming in previous years. That there have been people who "took what they needed" (their possible contribution to the House) and with that money they could afford their tickets back and forth to our House. We only know that we welcomed friends from Nicaragua, Paris or London just to share this weekend with us. That none of the people who had to cancel their reservation finally claimed the amounts paid, and they all decided to donate it to the House. In short: we have found that the heart and conscience are much more powerful than money, interest and our mental calculators. And all we can do is giving infinite thanks for having been able to live an experience, perhaps historic, and encourage other projects to be guided by the magic of GIFT.