

Gina LaRoche and Jen Cohen

*Living in Our Money-Driven Society: Navigating the Path to Awakening*

Week Three: “Truth Telling and Letting Go”

July 16, 2022



**Jen Cohen:** Hey everybody, welcome back to “Living in Our Money-Driven Society” with Jen and Gina. Today, as promised, we’re going to talk about breaking free from the money trap. As a reminder, we started our conversation talking about context: context of scarcity, context of excess, and the lies and secrets that we tell. Then we did some work last time on this great plane of accumulation and the myth that more is better, using certain practices to begin to clearly see the truth. Breaking free from the money trap is another practice that we’re going to use to be able to see clearly and live in an open-hearted and generous space relative to money, even in this kind of culture.

To start, we wanted to read something from our book. It’s called “This is our moment.” “This is our moment to declare a new story for life on Earth. What is the story we must tell and live? Do we declare success if everyone has eaten today on planet Earth?” If you remember, we talked about treasuring what we measure and measuring what we treasure. We definitely don’t measure our success right now based on whether everyone has eaten today. “Do we declare success if our 401Ks are loaded? Do we declare success if everyone knows they are safe? Do we declare success if we never have to work again? Do we declare success if every human being and every animal being knows their home will not be destroyed? Do we declare success if all our friends and colleagues have vowed to share what they have with us in tough times? We’d like to be part of defining a new narrative in this moment of shakedown and create metrics for success that serve all beings.”

As part of the path to getting there, we have to break free from the trap that we’re in, and we do consider ourselves in a trap and in a series of binds in this society. I’m going to hand it over to Gina to talk about the money trap.

**Gina LaRoche:** Thank you. This concept of breaking free from the money trap actually came from a request to come and do a talk. The person who requested the talk kept saying to me, “Will

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you give us the answer around money? Will you give us the answer?” I was so frustrated. There is no magic pill. There is no answer. And then I thought, I’m just going to say this is the answer.

There are three parts to breaking free from the money trap. For me, it’s the relative truth of our lives, particularly in Western society. As Jen said, these practices and these moves can provide a gateway toward awakening.

Step one to break free is to stop measuring ourselves and comparing ourselves by the number we have in our bank account, our wallets, and our 401Ks and comparing that to other people. We talked about the concept of measuring what we treasure and treasuring what we measure. Many of us are constantly comparing ourselves through numbers. If you’re anywhere near retirement, your YouTube ads start coming up: How much money do you need for retirement? What’s enough? This drives up this scarcity in the mind and body that I don’t have enough, I won’t be able to make it, and I compare myself to others.

Step two of breaking free from the money trap is really seeing yourself in the schema that we’ve designed, where you’re responsible—or responsible enough—around how you’re handling your money. Many times we can go to one of the four poles. We might be hyper responsible, hyper contracted, maybe even stingy. Or, on the other end of that pole, we might be in Fantasyland around money. This is a place in Western Buddhist culture where we can be in spiritual bypass, where we might think, “I don’t need to talk about money, and I don’t need money because I’m meditating.” The other two poles that we’ve already talked about are excess and scarcity. It’s finding what is enough inside of this paradigm. How can you hold generosity without giving away too much or being too tight or having way too much? Sometimes when we talk to people about their finances, they’ll say, “Well, I want to be a billionaire. I want to have so much money—way too much money—so I can give it away.” But it’s still in this place of excess. We’ve talked a lot about scarcity: real scarcity, where people struggle to have enough to house

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and feed and clothe themselves, and imagined scarcity, where we’ve known multimillionaires who literally wake up in the middle of the night having panic attacks about not having enough money. Being able to titrate yourself across these four dimensions is key.

The third step is reallocating my resources toward the people and organizations that speak to me deeply. This is the step that starts this pivot away from the relative truth of what I’ve been taught about how I’m supposed to be around money and finances. For some people, this means allocating your resources toward yourself, toward your health and well-being, toward getting out of debt or paying off a student loan. Maybe you owe your sister some money, or maybe it’s time to buy long-term care insurance or life insurance, to add some responsibility. It also could mean allocating your resources toward buying your food from farmers markets, toward buying handmade clothes, or toward independent booksellers. It also could mean giving to the organizations and causes that speak most deeply to you.

As you walk through these three steps, it’s not a linear path. There’s a lot of truth telling to yourself. There may be some amends to make to others. It’s an easy process, and I like to start with going to your bank account or your Apple Pay and seeing who you’re giving money to. What are the organizations or the companies that you are giving your financial resources to? At the same time, it is a good opportunity to look at where you’re giving your personal time and attention, your talent, and see if they’re aligned. You might realize, “Oh, I’m giving all my money to Amazon, but I’m giving all my time to my local Buddhist center. Maybe I want to reallocate that money from Amazon to my local Buddhist center.”

So those are the three steps to breaking free from the money trap and to starting this path toward awakening through truth telling. We can ask: How much debt do I have? Where am I in scarcity? How much money is in the bank? A lot of times, when we ask people those questions, they don’t know the answers. Answering those questions starts you on this path.

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**Jen Cohen:** We also have a practice where we invite people to expand the frame, breaking free from the money trap where we think of our bounty or our wealth only in terms of money. The practice of expanding our frame, which we call the asset inventory, is a practice of breaking free from the money trap because we really only use one or two metrics for success in our society: actual financial capital and the things that that capital bought. There are so many more available elements of our wealth: the wealth of the friendships that we have, the bounty of the Earth around us, family networks, all kinds of things that can be added to our balance sheet that we can begin to declare are valuable enough to measure and to treasure, to bring in something that we talked about last time and pull it forward to this conversation about breaking free from the money trap.

All of that also breaks us out of this deluded state. We're constantly navigating these myths that there's not enough, more is always better, and I've got to get more, and then I'll be happy. This is another practice that helps us see that there's a lot here. Even for those of us who have very little financial resources, there are other resources. There are other elements to our wealth and our bounty that we have chosen as a culture, not necessarily as individuals, to not measure, to obfuscate from our view. When we bring them back into relief, they begin to expand the story that we're telling and shift the context around money to one that's much more in alignment with the teachings and with practice.

That brings us to the close of today. Those are some of the ways that we go about reclaiming the mind and moving out of greed, hatred, delusion into states of clarity and into a space in which practicing *dana* and generosity to self and to others and with all our wealth of resources becomes available.

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Next time, we're going to talk directly about generosity. Gina is going to speak to us about the 10 *paramis* or perfections, which come directly from the Buddha's teaching. So here's your homework question. It's one of Gina's favorite questions, so I wasn't allowed to miss it. What secret about money am I willing to share with at least one other person as a practice of letting go? So we're moving out of secrets and lies.