

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN

Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela, our canine sage-in-residence, would love to help. Please write to her in care of FiP, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542, and she will give you her answer in our next issue.



Dear Angela,

How do we maintain a spirit of generosity during financially difficult times, when we may be feeling that we don't even have enough for ourselves? Thank you.

Sincerely,
Penny Pinch

Dear Penny,

Thank you for taking time to write to me. I appreciate the opportunity this question of yours gives me to discuss this important subject.

Here is a fine example of a question which poses a dilemma for me, the growing guru who would like to appear more generous than I actually am. Let me say at the outset that unlike grooming and greeting, which I am really great about, being generous is something I'm growing into.

Let me begin by saying that I think there may actually be times in our lives when it is wiser to be guarded and protective about our things. There may be a good reason to ration what we have. Being stingy may be appropriate and certainly understandable. Feeling like you do not have enough or that you're just about to run out of something you love and need can be terribly scary. When we feel threatened and frightened, it is very hard to feel and be generous. Once we realize our stingy feelings come from fear and nervousness about tomorrow, it's all easier to cope with and get through. Once you realize this, you can have your stingy feelings and really enjoy them—expressing your fear about running out really helps, too. Once you've acknowledged being scared and have lamented your plight, there's room available to let in some feelings of generosity again.

In my own life, there have been times when I have stared down at the last ten Kibbles in a once full food bowl. This situation has not found me at my generous best. Tough questions need to be addressed. When will someone be back? What happens if I get hungry before they do come back? When someone does come home, how long will it take them to notice that more Kibble is required? For me, ten Kibbles left is a time of care, concern, and caution. If you find yourself in a low-food-dish situation, do not berate yourself for a stingy attitude. Forgive yourself. Use the worry as an opportunity to see if there is something to be done about it.

As I have mentioned before, releasing the fear we have about not having enough is the first step we need to take before a generous spirit can grow. One of the best ways I know of releasing our fears is through howling and yowling or engaging in other satisfying and fulfilling noise-making opportunities. When my one favorite blanket is being washed, I often pace in an agitated manner and howl mournfully throughout most of the rinse and spin cycles. Whimpering works well during drying time and by the time my blanket is returned to me, the pacing and noise-making has consoled me so well that a generous spirit takes over.

Sometimes when I'm fluffing up the folds of my blanket or licking my paws, I like to offer up a little prayer—I ask for a shift in attitude.

Here are some other techniques I've used successfully in building up a generous spirit at a low-food-bowl period.

During lean times, show extra kindness to yourself—indulge in pleasant occupations that make you feel good about yourself and life. My personal favorites are nail-nipping and fur-licking. Often I like to sit under my favorite bush in the backyard. Here I make a mental list of all those I'll be sharing some Cheerios with just as soon as there is plenty to spare. While you're making your own list of those you'll let share your extra Kibble, keep in mind that at some point we all need to stop counting and trust that there is enough.

Sometimes when we are feeling our most stingy, that may very well be just the time to have a long, luxurious stretch and act in the most generous manner you can muster. You might try sharing a few of those

last ten Kibbles—if not, you can do what I have done: offer one corner of your favorite blanket to another soul to sit down upon and keep you company. Or, you might find a soul who needs some time, or attention. Then you might sit quietly beside them on the couch, and even perhaps place one paw on their arm.

Whenever I have extended myself personally to my buddy, the feeling of warmth and kindness I have given out has a magical way of bouncing back to me. Therefore I suggest that you find opportunities to offer another soul first, just the very thing you feel you want to receive.

Sometimes when I'm fluffing up the folds of my blanket or licking my paws, I like to offer up a little prayer—I ask for a shift in my attitude. The new attitude says I am complete. All that I have is plenty. Inside I have all that I need. I will say that this little prayer doesn't actually pour more Kibble into the bowl, but it sure makes the waiting more comforting and consoling.

Also, the notion that whatever we truly need will be provided is a notion worth chewing on while your own blanket is in the dryer.

Finally, as a reminder to us all, I leave here the law of never-ending Kibble supply: When the bowl is empty, someone will pour more Kibble in so that the bowl is full once more—unless, of course, they've forgotten the dog food and pour out a full bowl of Cheerios instead.

To all of you longing to feel more generous, even in the face of adversity, I hope I have been of some help and hope.

Faithfully,
Angela