

Gratitude (4 of 5) Appreciation

November 28, 2024

SUMMARY KEYWORDS Thanksgiving Day, giving, generosity, bumper sticker: “I stop for appreciation,” feel heartfelt connection to others, embody thanks directly, create room in your heart, contentment

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Welcome to this fourth talk on gratitude. Coincidentally, it's also the Gratitude Day in the United States – Thanksgiving Day. I love the idea that the word “thanksgiving” has the word “giving” in it. It touches into the profound aspect of Buddhist spirituality that involves generosity. “To give.”

One of the most profound things we can give other people is our appreciation of them. Gratitude begins with appreciation. I want to underscore this. There are three steps – three aspects of generosity – that make it robust and full. One is taking time to appreciate. Really recognizing and acknowledging what it is that we benefited from, what we received, what goodness we've seen. Really take time to appreciate. Don't be in a hurry; don't overlook; stop. Maybe the bumper sticker can say, “I stop for appreciation.”

The second aspect is taking in the goodness of appreciation, the thankfulness of it, receiving it deeply inside of you, so that it opens you or touches you in a deep way. It moves you so that the emotionality, tenderness, and warmth of it are allowed space to be in you. Take it in and receive it, almost relax with it. Don't take it in with intensity, assuming now you have to do something in reply. Maybe you have to immediately apologize or say “thank you” quickly. But take time to really let it register because it's one of the means to open the heart. One of the means to feel a more heartfelt connection to others is to allow ourselves to feel the thankfulness that we have, to feel the generosity someone else has offered. Then there's more embodiment, there's more fullness to this thanksgiving we can give. We want to express it in some way, as I talked about yesterday.

The second aspect of generosity is to give thanks indirectly by how well and deeply we appreciate others. Even with people who are difficult for us, is there a silver lining? Is there something you can see that's wonderful in the person – the goodness, inner beauty, integrity, or authenticity? What can you appreciate in others? This is a gift. Many people in our world are not appreciated enough. Some people have never really been appreciated. So see, take time, and acknowledge what you see is good. It could be as simple as saying, “Oh, thank you. It's so helpful that you're helping with the dishes today”. Or, “Wow, you came right away to help with that”, or “to bring the food to the table.” Or “You really stopped. I saw you. You really stopped and sat with that person. They looked like they were being sad.”

You don't necessarily have to tell them, but really take time to appreciate what you see. Make it an art. Make it a practice to look for the silver lining, for what's good in people. Almost like your heart is going to say hello to it. Resonate with it; feel it; and maybe then say some nice things about it. Maybe that's when you say, “Thank you. Thank you for the kindness. Thank you for your helpfulness. Thank you for your care and your sympathy. Thank you for how honest you were.” Whatever it might be that you see, Or maybe you don't say it directly if it seems too personal or awkward in the situation, but even then you can look and see people with appreciative eyes. What is good in people? This response brings out what is good and reinforces it. It might also open your heart. Maybe it resonates with the same goodness in you. For you to recognize it in someone else means something in you knows that. And maybe that inspires and opens you.

Then, after taking time to really appreciate someone, the third aspect of gratitude is to offer thanks. Do this in such a way that it opens you even more. A thanks that's not quick, not shutting people out, but really almost like the beginning of a relationship. “Thank you. Thank you for helping with the dishes. It was nice doing it with you.” It almost it looks like you're not expecting anything. You're just open to the moment, to what follows. You're opening. Don't let it stop in us.

So there's this wonderful cycle of gratitude and generosity. Gratitude and appreciation that we receive goodness and benefits from the world. Even when the gift is not specifically to us, we benefit seeing the goodness in others. Receive that, but don't let it stop. Don't say, "Well, that person's so wonderful, but I'm not." And then you feel inadequate. If you feel and sense someone else's goodness, you have it in you somewhere. Let the cycles continue. Open up and appreciate more. Feel the goodness of other people more. And the goodness of the situation. The goodness of this life. Then let your response – your own generosity – lead you to offer something in return. Offer thanks, gratitude, or generosity. Offer to do the dishes or help set the table. Offer to sit with someone. Make a difference in the world in some way so you keep the cycles flowing. You keep them unfolding. And don't let it stop with you. Even if it stops with someone else, keep it flowing.

Gratitude is an invaluable part of our life. This is a process of appreciating the world, feeling connected, tender-hearted, warm-hearted, or broken-hearted in profound ways, and then offering a connection through that experience. It helps if you have a certain contentment. Don't be in a hurry. Don't be filled with desires for things and activities and for the conversation to go your way, agreeing with your opinions. Be content with what's happening here. So there's room, always creating room in your heart. Room for others and for yourself, room for appreciating what's here and the goodness that's here. Then support that realization to grow.

Your thanks is not an end of the story. The proper thanks, the good thanks, and the embodied thanks – these are really heartfelt appreciation. We take time to do that. It's the food or the fuel for more goodness in this world. More goodness in our families and our communities. More goodness that spreads with strangers we meet on the street, in stores, or in places of work.

May it be that we can be mindful, present, attentive, and content enough to see the goodness – even the sliver of goodness – in others. Our appreciating that and taking it in. We are being inspired by it. We encourage our own generosity and goodness to see what we can offer to this world. And don't underestimate the tremendous benefit of expressing thanks in all the ways you can think of.

Thank you very much for our time together today ... and this week, this year, and these years that we've been gathering on YouTube. I feel very fortunate that all of you are interested in this and coming regularly. This is important for you and important for me. I feel that. I benefit from it and am inspired by it. I offer you my thanks and appreciation that we're doing this together.

Thank you for today, and may this day be nurturing for you.