

The Gratitude Attitude

by Bodhisattva Shree Swami Premodaya

We have a holiday in the United States, specific to this country: Thanksgiving. It is strange, because there is not much evidence of *real* thankfulness. The holiday comes from the pilgrim times. They were *truly* thankful. They had to be. They could be sincere, because their thankfulness was about not having died under harsh conditions (horribly inclement weather and not nearly enough food for the season). If not for the Indians, they would definitely have died, and they knew it. The Indians came to their rescue. So maybe for a season or two, there was real thankfulness, but that was hundreds of years ago, and is just lip service at this point. The turkey is good though; it's an eating holiday now!

Real thankfulness, genuine appreciation, is appreciation for the gift of life, and is no less than the actual spiritual path. There is no living spiritual tradition, no real spiritual path, that is not about — at its core, at its endpoint — the development of true thankfulness inside you, every single moment. It becomes automatic; it becomes like breathing. No other stance is possible; no other attitude can march ahead of it. And the synonym for it, once it is experienced in its full force, is *humility* — a bone-crushing kind of humility. Not some false humbleness, but really seeing in the proper perspective — seeing that you are just a grain of sand. It is crushing to fully see that for the first time. The ego really shatters, because you recognize that you have been deluding yourself for a lifetime, that you *are* something, when it turns out you are a grain of sand. But in really seeing this, tremendous gratitude, tremendous thankfulness arises in you, that even as a grain of sand, you are given all this, you are allowed all this! It turns out to all be a gift.

And it is not that gratitude has to be expressed, or gratitude has to be lived, or appreciation has to be shown, or devotion has to be cultivated. It is literally that you *become* that. It is literally that you breathe it in and out with every breath. The expression becomes you. Countless stars, immeasurable space, planets beyond counting — who knows how many universes, how many worlds, how many realities out there? Vastness beyond what any human mind could even try to comprehend; eternity stretching endlessly; infinity with no beginning and no end; how can there be any stance, other than our complete and utter humility, in the face of that mystery?

Now, expressing whatever gratitude is there, expressing whatever humility is felt, is productive only in the sense that it helps you be in that space. Otherwise the expression of it is not really needed. It is the living of it that is needed, the feeling of it. But for us fallible humans, expressing it, saying it, writing it, thinking it, helps us be there. So to that degree, it is useful. But in-and-of itself, the expression has no real purpose, other than the expression of an overflowing heart. Because, really, it cannot be expressed. You will know it is the ultimate gratitude when you find that no expression

adequately says it for you, no word or phrase or even paragraph captures it. Then you will know “this is real gratitude,” because it will feel so inadequate to say anything.

Nothing that is based in actual truth can ever be said. At best it can be hinted at with words, suggested, but never truly said, never accurately expressed. Expression, real expression — real expression of gratitude, real expression of overwhelming humility — is always in silence. The expression is always a silent expression, literally emanating from your being. And people feel it. Certainly you felt it

from yourself, or for someone else, at some moment in your life. Maybe often, maybe rarely, but certainly you must have felt it. And if you have, now understand that it is just another form of love — a more specific experience or expression of love itself. It is the more divine aspect of love: love as gratitude, love as humility — not asking for anything, not grasping for anything, just emanating, just endlessly giving, pulsing, flowing. Call it “the divine condition.”

We really just swing back and forth between gratitude and indulgence; and indulgence is always self-indulgence, and gratitude is always selfless gratitude. So oddly enough, this is the unlooked-for explanation of everything in life — the only possibility: selfless gratitude or self-focused indulgence — more or less one or the other, in any given moment. And that is

apparently the human circumstance: how close are we to one or the other in this moment? The high road and the low road? The self-aggrandizing or the self-surrendering?

But we are strange creatures doing strange things, and our minds do not want to see that reality is actually, in many ways, quite simple. Am I moving towards selfishness, or am I moving toward selflessness? In this moment, in any moment, in any circumstance, in any given thing that is happening that includes us. Such a simple question, such a simple dimension to operate on — too simple, for the mind — not complicated enough to capture our interest. We would rather analyze, we would rather ponder deeply, we would rather come up with important answers to significant questions. But the simple truth is it is all a question of how close are we to gratitude and humility (or how far away). In this moment, are you grateful to be breathing and not dead — grateful for life? Or is there some kind of self-focused sense of being preoccupied with other things? This can always be looked at, any moment, without any great effort: where am I in that dimension? On that continuum? This is the whole measure of spiritual progress. Complicated philosophies and religions and spiritual volumes written, millions of pages — and it all boils down to that question — amazingly enough, all are just methods to get to that question.

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your body. It is not an emotion. Real gratitude is more like the molecules that comprise you. And yes, it starts as a feeling, it feels like an emotion. You felt it in a lesser form, for other reasons, in other ways, but if it is to transform you — if it is to be spiritual gratitude, divine love — then it is more like the molecules of your body. You feel it in a different way, you feel it deep in you — not as just a feeling like any other. It transports you higher, it gives you the sense of something bigger. And perhaps you have felt this, either for a moment, or even many times, or for long periods.

Anytime that experience is there, I encourage you to give yourself fully to it, to let it expand in you whenever it appears. It is the highest inspiration. It is the highest possible expression of spiritual depth. Just the experiencing of it opens you, expands you, evolves you, transforms you, connects you.

Everyone who says “I am searching for truth,” everyone who says “I want realization,” everyone who says “I want god in my life,” is saying (whether they know it or not) that they want to travel to gratitude — they want gratitude to take over their life. And usually we don't know that *that* is where it ends — *that* is where it ends up. We think that where it ends up is in some kind of higher consciousness, that we know something more, understand something more about existence, operate on some kind of higher level. And whether that is the case or not, we end up at humility and gratitude. *That* is the higher level. Then there is real, genuine thankfulness — for a piece of bread. Then there is real, true humility — at being able to walk and talk. Then hearing a symphony, inside you, brings you to your knees. Then the everyday becomes magical, mystical. Then the unknown penetrates all the way, and you find yourself living more in the beyond than right here in this world. Because that is where this world is, smack dab in the middle of the beyond. And only gratitude, only humility, let you see that fully. It is a circle: Because gratitude and humility take you there, and when you get there, you are given more gratitude and humility. It just expands. And then real prayer is possible, which is just the ceaseless experience of gratitude. Then it does not even occur to ask for anything; the only feeling is to involuntarily say “thank you” for everything. Then anything is enough. Then everything is enough. Then whatever is wrong, is just part of what is right. Then whatever you don't like, doesn't matter anymore. Then truth is more important than you are.

And oddly enough, it *does* help to act “as if.” So until it is true of you, and until it is more true with every breath, it actually does help to remember, and to act as if. And if real humility comes to you, it will always be accompanied by gratitude. And if real gratitude rises up in you, it will always include genuine humility. So that is the measure. To know if the gratitude is real, check if humility came with it. To know if the humility is real, check if it includes deep gratitude (because false humility is possible and non-genuine gratitude is possible; we are complex enough that it is possible). But it is easy to check if it is real.

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Gratitude and humility are the actual coins of the spiritual realm. No other coinage buys you anything in that realm — but gratitude and humility buy you everything. That is the exchange the divine is asking for. Anything you let go of, anything you become unattached to, disidentified from, allows more space for gratitude, and riper conditions for humility. Detachment is not an end in itself. It has no ultimate purpose. It just creates better conditions for gratitude and humility. The selfish part of that is that complete and real detachment — non-attachment — means

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an end to real suffering. Because how can there be suffering, if you are not attached to anything? But if you really look deeply it is a “selfish” goal: “I want to not suffer anymore.” There’s nothing wrong with it. It works as a fantastic motivator. And you can reach a life of non-suffering, but it is not the end — it is only the endpoint of the selfish part. The selfless part is when you are taken over by gratitude and humility. Then it is not about whether *you* suffer or do not suffer. It is about the vastness and greatness that is. And then you are not quite so worried whether you are going to suffer tomorrow more, or less. Because then it is possible to be grateful for whatever comes. Because all of it is recognized as a gift — an undeserved, unasked-for gift.

Really, ultimately, you never asked for anything, except just not to suffer. That is how humble human beings really are. All we ask is, “Please just let me not suffer.” It is a very humble request, and totally possible for any sincere heart. But many do not want to get that sincere, so they do not get close to it. But many do.

What I’m trying to point out is, there are stages beyond that, stages that have nothing to do with anything personal,

anything individual, anything that can be categorized as “only of this lifetime.” You can go so much higher, so much further, and every sincere heart is capable. That is what we mean by “beyond self:” beyond the beyond. This is more important than whether you are rich or poor. This is more important than whether you are healthy or sick. This is more important than whether your future is bright or bleak. This is what is *really* important. *This* is what matters. This *is* “the profound.”

It turns out it’s not abstract. It’s about how is this life being experienced right now? — in this body, in this place, in this moment, as *this me*. That is not abstract at all. That is your life-blood, that is your very breath. It is real. It pulses. It radiates out with every heartbeat. And all of it has been given to you. You didn’t buy it in a store. You didn’t ask for it, and then it got delivered. You came with it, pre-given, unbidden, just gifted to you. When you consider that, it starts to make sense, why gratitude is the basic coin of the realm.

So start to see gratitude and humility not as nice human virtues — not as desirable traits or qualities to be developed because they have some intrinsic benefit and make you a nicer person (certainly they will). But it is much more significant than that. It is the very fabric of reality. It is the very breath of the divine. Start to see gratitude and humility as the highest possibilities, as the stones the path is made out of. Then anywhere you look: the benediction! Then everything that is: the divine blessing! Then truly: Thanksgiving!

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Bodhisattva Shree Swami Premodaya's life work has transformed and improved the lives of thousands. He is a spiritual master who easily and elegantly bridges East & West, ancient & modern, and has been compared to Osho, Gangaji, Adyashanti and Eckhart Tolle, among others. See Swamiji on YouTube.

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