



## *Be Thankful for All Your Wondrous Gifts*

Thanksgiving for you, as a spiritual aspirant, implies understanding the gifts that God has given you, and thanking God for those gifts. In this world-process, every individual has been given the wondrous gift of embodiment. Embodiment consists of one's physical body, the *pranas*, the senses, the mind, the intellect, and the ego. This is the gift that has been given to the soul so that it may attain freedom and experience infinite bliss. When you understand this great opportunity that has been given to you, your heart flows towards God in thankfulness.

*By Swami Jyotirmayananda*

Those who are not spiritually sensitive give thanks to God every now and then or perhaps only at special occasions. You may think that the things for which you give thanks to God are counted, but the truth of the matter is that you should give thanks to God for everything you have. Not only should you give thanks for the positive situations that develop in your life, but even for the negative ones as well. The reason for this is that what appears negative may be a blessing in disguise.

If you have spiritual sensitivity, you will realize that there is a purpose behind every negative development, behind every frustrated desire. How can this be understood easily?

Imagine for a moment that there is a parrot in a cage. Now and then this parrot dreams of being free and flying in the sky. If the bars of its cage show any signs of breaking, the parrot will be delighted and there will be a sense of thrill in its heart. The parrot will think that soon there will be enough room for it to escape and fly away.

But let us suppose that the parrot is too attached to its cage. It has been watching the cage since its infancy, and it has admired every part of it. Suddenly, one of the bars breaks due to the rust that has accumulated over the years. Because of this, the parrot's heart breaks and it feels despondent. It begins to think that now its life is going to be completely desolate. Everything that gave the parrot comfort and a sense of security is breaking down and disintegrating.

You can easily see the two angles of view. For the parrot that is attached to the cage, every change

in it is a form of frustration, a tense experience. But for the parrot who is not attached to the cage and who wants to fly, every breakage in that cage, even the tiniest fissure, is accepted with joy. Each crack is a message of freedom.

Like the parrot with the vision of freedom, an aspirant must develop insight into the fact that even the apparently negative situations in life have profound meaning. From the ego's standpoint, negative situations are frustrating. Nevertheless, if you have spiritual insight, you realize that every negative situation helps you reflect upon what you should or should not depend upon. If you confront a negative situation in the right way, you will grow in mystical wisdom.

Thus, give thanks to God not just for those positive situations that arise in your life, but for the negative situations as well. In this way, you will develop a more profound spirit of thankfulness.

As this spirit grows, try more and more to fully utilize all the gifts that God has given you, and, in doing so, to nurture the perpetual awareness that God is with you.

**M**ira, the great Saint and Hindi poet, sang:

*God has given you eyes  
so that you can behold  
His beauty;*

*God has given you hands  
so that you can serve Him;*

*God has given you ears  
so that you can hear the  
Divine praises;*

*God has given you a tongue  
so that you can utter His  
Divine Name;*

*God has given you a mind  
so that you can meditate on Him;*

*God has given you an intellect  
so that you can enquire into  
His nature;  
God has given you a heart  
where you can commune  
with Him.*

If you develop this type of spirit, you are living a life of real thankfulness to God. Until you become fully aware of a Divine meaning behind your life and realize that God permeates your existence, you are living a shallow life. When you truly appreciate God, you become joyous, enjoying profound ecstasy. How wonderful it is to be embodied as a human being!

#### **THE GREAT BLESSING OF HUMAN EMBODIMENT**

Sri Shankaracharya writes that three things are unique in this world: The first is *Manushyatwam*—to be embodied as a human being. The second is *Mumukshuttwam*—to develop aspiration for Self-realization. The third is *Mahapurusha-Samshraya*—the guidance of a spiritual preceptor. These three things are the most blessed developments in life.

It is a profound opportunity for a soul to acquire human embodiment. Do not let this opportunity slip by. The vast majority of people are not aware of the implication of being a human being. As you observe animals and other forms of life, reflect upon the condition of countless souls in different embodiments. This will help you realize just how wonderful it is to live in a human embodiment.

Think of some poor people who are living in thatched mud huts, while you are living in a luxurious penthouse condominium. You

would look down on everything and say, “How fortunate I am!” In the same way, human embodiment is a blessed development compared to other embodiments.

Unfortunately, time passes by and people do not pursue the goal for which their embodiment was given. To better understand this, recall the story of a poor fisherman and a bag of jewels:

One evening as the fisherman sat in his boat gazing at the horizon illumined by the bright light of the full moon, he looked down into the shallow water and saw something that resembled a bag. He picked it up and opened it. Inside he found a large number of shiny stones. This made him chuckle, but at the same time his mind was extremely burdened by his problems. He was not able to catch enough fish to make a living. How was he going to sustain his family?

Simply to distract his mind from his worries, he started tossing those stones one by one so that he could see how they splashed over the water. He continued doing this until only a few of them were left. Then he looked closely at them and realized that they were pearls. Each one was worth enough to make him immensely rich. The moment he realized their value, he began to treasure them and use them for the money that he needed. Accordingly, he and his family prospered.

The situation is similar with every individual. As a human being, you have the possibility of recognizing the value of your resources, which, if utilized, will bring you the highest treasure, Self-realization. But due to illusion

and the pressures of past karmas, the vast majority of people just let time slip by. Years pass by and the same illusions are pursued. The mind continues to move in the same vicious cycles. Life goes rolling on until you suddenly realize that much of your wonderful time has been wasted.

However, the moment you have a proper understanding of what you must accomplish, you will begin to utilize whatever time and resources that you have left. And by utilizing these things efficiently, you will experience how wondrous human embodiment is. With your effort you can attain God-realization—oneness with God.

### **FOUR GATEKEEPERS TO LIBERATION**

Keeping all this in view, think about those things that you must do in your daily life so that the spirit of prayerfulness and thankfulness will permeate your personality. Recall the four gatekeepers of Yoga Vasistha.

#### **Satsanga—Good Association**

The first gatekeeper is *satsanga* (good association). Try to attend *satsanga* regularly in order to utilize the pearls of your resources instead of just throwing them away as every soul does. There must be a place where you can listen to the teachings of the scriptures and begin to understand the value of life and what is most important to pursue.

Understand that your material pursuits should not overpower your spiritual yearning. Instead, the

material world should be subservient to your spiritual movement. Do not let material things destroy your peace of mind. Attainment of peace of mind is on a higher plane than the acquisition of objects. Spiritual qualities such as humility, sincerity, mastery over the mind, generosity, and magnanimity of heart are greater treasures than large numbers of material possessions and objects.

This sort of understanding must dawn in an individual. Place things in their proper perspective. Material things are certainly needed in life, but they should not overpower your spiritual sensitivity. Rather, material objects should allow your mind to become relaxed so that it may explore the inner dimension of spirit. Allowing your mind to relax and enjoy peace, harmony, and the good qualities that emanate from your personality should be the delight of life.

This understanding of the glory of the spiritual values of life cannot be underestimated. Hold before your mind the ideals of Saints and Sages, not those of merchants and businessmen. Do not subscribe to a life of empty power or vain glory. Strive for the ideals of Saints and Sages that you learn through *satsanga*.

#### **Shama—Serenity**

The next gatekeeper according to Yoga Vasistha is *shama* (serenity of mind). Try to keep your mind balanced in pleasure and pain, gain and loss. Balance or serenity of mind is a great attainment that allows you to observe the Divine Presence in objects. When serenity is lacking, you are guided by

your ego and your desires. Desires create a smoke-screen before your mind, and you do not see things as they really are. The mind is restless when desires exist in it.

When you understand that happiness is not found outside you, but within, you allow your mind to relax. In practical life you may have expectations and desires, but you begin to rise above them. You also realize that even if a desire is frustrated, you are not going to be ruined.

If you are not a philosopher or a thinker, your whole life depends on certain expectations. If those expectations are not fulfilled, you become completely overwhelmed. But this should not be so. As you follow the spiritual path, you should not allow yourself to be shaken. Of course you'll shake a little, but not from the very roots.

When you are developing serenity you are revealing a mental dimension that is not touched by the world. You are creating a room in your mind that remains untouched. This is analogous to what is done in Hindu homes when a certain area is set aside for a temple. The children can shout and jump around or do whatever they want throughout the house, but the temple is one place where they cannot play; it is strictly reserved for worship. Similarly, you should reserve a corner of your mind that remains untouched by the world and is meant for eternity alone.

### **Santosh—Contentment**

The next great quality that is to be developed is *santosh* (contentment). It is the third gatekeeper of

Yoga Vasistha. Try to appreciate what you have instead of comparing yourself to others or constantly observing the things that they have. Your mind becomes restless the moment you develop the illusion that others have more than you do, and that therefore they must be happier.

You should realize that happiness does not come because of external conditions and that everyone is actually in the same predicament. You have as much possibility of being happy as anybody else in the world. True spiritual happiness is a matter of understanding; it cannot come from external vanities.

If you lack contentment, you will remain restless no matter what you gain, because there will always be someone who has more than you do. There will always be greater possibilities you envision for yourself. Thus, contentment or *santosh* is a profound virtue that one must develop.

### **Vichar—Enquiry**

The next gatekeeper Sage Vasistha talks about is *vichar* or enquiry. This refers to pursuing the

profound question “Who Am I?” as you try to understand the deepest mysteries of life. In practicing *vichar*, you allow your intellect to become pure and reflective. If this process continues, unhampered by your ego, intellect becomes intuitive. Through intuitional understanding you realize: “I am not this body. I am not the mind. I am not the intellect. I am *Brahman*. I am one with the Absolute Self.”

So try to befriend these four gatekeepers, as Sage Vasistha says. If four prove to be too much for you, try befriending just one of them. You will find that the other three will join in automatically. For instance, if you befriend just *satsanga*, you will gradually learn the art of serenity, contentment, and reflection. Or if you develop just contentment, you will become drawn to *satsanga* and the others will fall into place automatically. By befriending these gatekeepers, you are allowing the gate to Liberation to be swung wide open. And then you really attain the fullness of the spirit of thankfulness. Then you have utilized all your resources, and you have attained Liberation.

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