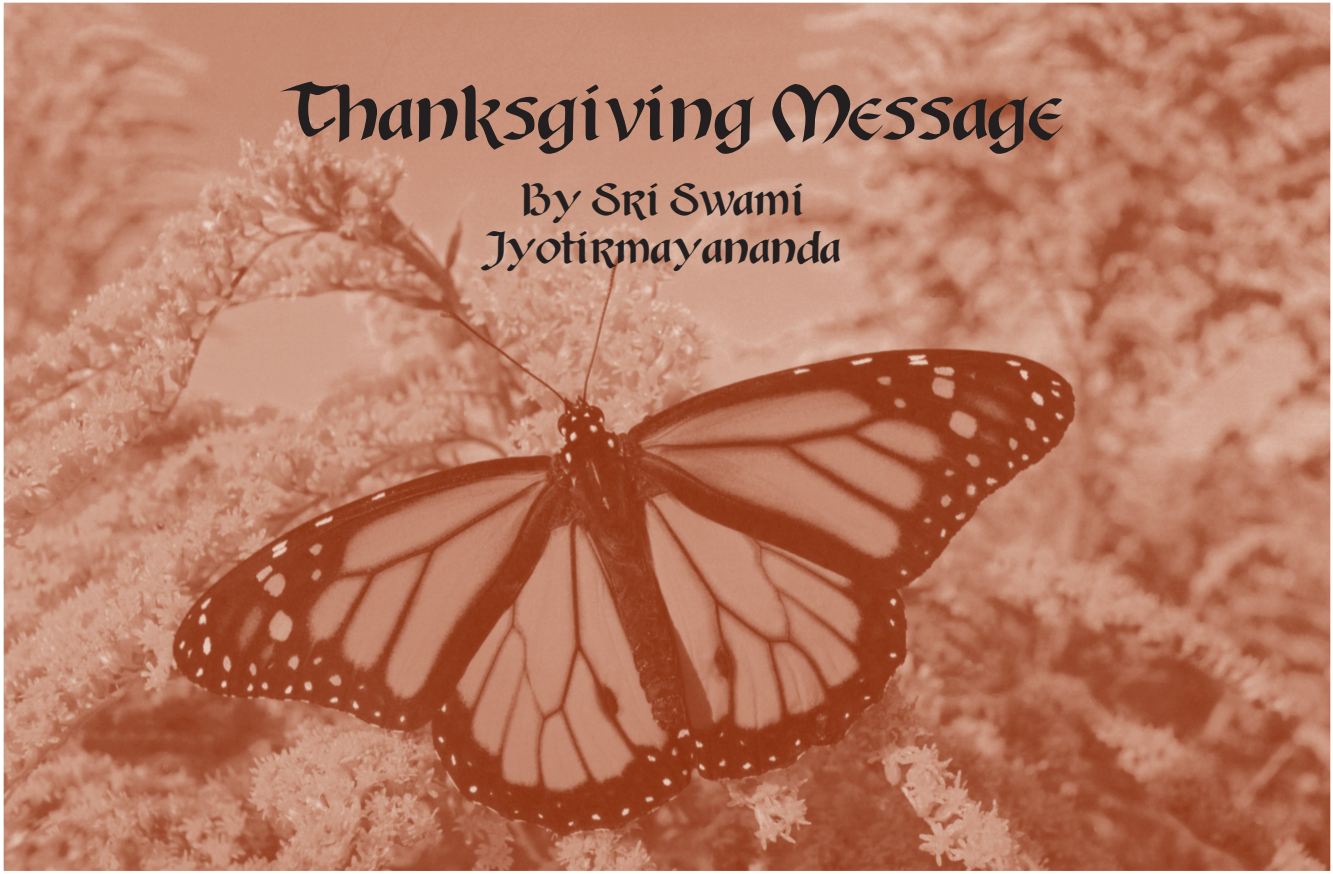


Thanksgiving Message

By Sri Swami
Jyotirmayananda



MIND— YOUR GREATEST TREASURE

Blessed Self in All, Adorations! Thanksgiving is a time when people generally count their blessings and give thanks to God. To most people, life's blessings are few and can always be counted on ten fingers: One gives thanks for good health; for success in business; for a good grade on a school examination; for completing a project. But there is much more to understanding your place in this creation and the project you have before you in life. This is the mystical aspect of Thanksgiving that I want to share with you.

To understand this other dimension, your attention must be directed towards your relationship with God, Who has given you this psychophysical mechanism of body, mind, and senses—an amaz-

ing tool with which you can promote the highest blessedness. For this you must be thankful.

The greatest gift that God has given you is your mind. This incredible instrument, if used correctly, gives you the capacity to reason, think, and feel in a way that sets man apart from the limitations of the animal kingdom. Take the human mind away and the world sinks in darkness. It is through the mind that we recognize the world with its complexity, its beauty, and its majesty. Who knows the mountains as mountains? Who enjoys the rivers and has given names to them? Who has explored the mysteries of the universe? It is the human mind—not the instinct-dominated mind of the animal—that has given names, designations, and attributes to things.

For that most wonderful instrument of mind you must be profoundly grateful.

That gratitude must be expressed through a sincere effort to use the mind to its fullest capacity. Sometimes we receive a great book as a gift, thank the person heartily, and then put it up on a bookshelf where it may sit untouched for years. Reading the book and benefiting from its wisdom would have been a better “thank you” to the giver. Likewise, God has given the gift of mind, but if you waste your mental energy in idleness or in negative thinking, or by worrying over trifles day by day, you are failing to express your gratitude to the Divine Giver in a meaningful way.

It is said in the Upanishads: “*Mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoh*”—“Mind is the cause of bondage and release.” Through mind you can ascend to the sublimest heights of prosperity or descend to the lowest depths of degradation. So amazing is the power of your mind that it can take you from overwhelming joy to gripping sorrow in a matter of minutes.

Through Yoga philosophy you learn that your mind, which has existed throughout all your countless embodiments, molds your body. This truth may seem confusing, because most people equate “mind” with the brain and nervous system. However, this is an erroneous way of thinking. Just as electricity is different from the wires through which it flows, so too, mind is different from the brain and nervous system through which it flows.

Prior to your birth, mind was there. Owing to the mysterious operation of karma, the mind chose your body. It has created the circumstances that have placed you in your present family. All the situations of your life are a result of the karmic impressions within your mind. Because of this, every situation has a purpose leading to your evolution.

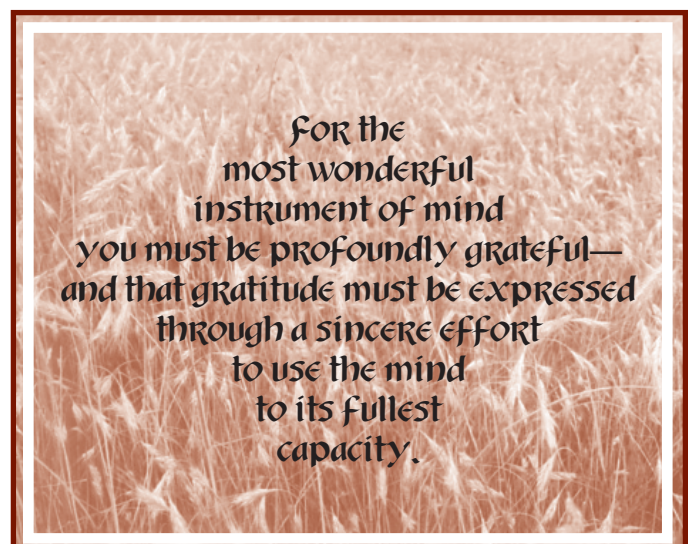
Many people do not understand this point, believing that the developments in their lives are accidental. Many, having studied about genetics in school, feel that laws of heredity explain everything about why they look and behave as they do. When viewing any deficiencies or accomplishments in their personality, they say that they are probably

due to the genes that their parents passed to them. But this is not so. According to Yoga philosophy, it is karma that has led you to your family and arranged all the hereditary factors, making them fall into place to create your realities.

Further, the fundamental truth of karma is that you create it each second you live. In the past you consciously allowed your mind to move in a particular way. As a result, karma was formed that created your body. You may ask, “If mind creates everything, why does a person choose painful situations? Why does a person choose to be miserable, to be born in a poor family, or to be born in one with many adversities?”

Let me give you a simple explanation with this illustration. Suppose you are blind in both eyes and pray to God, “O Lord, give me at least one eye to see with.” So you die as a blind man and then are reborn as a one-eyed man. From your very childhood people laugh at you. In your unhappiness you cry out, “O God, why did you put me in this miserable state? You are a cruel God.” And you develop many frustrations.

The same applies to your real life in a more intricate way. You have promoted everything that you experience. To most people this idea is shocking. However, it should be most inspiring because you know that your entire life has been placed in your own hands. As long as you feel that your life is in someone else’s hands, whose moods you do not know, you cannot be at rest.



But Yoga philosophy explains that your life is in your own hands. You are the cause of whatever has evolved in your personality and in the circumstances of your life, be they good or bad, positive or negative. Therefore, you have the freedom to change your situation, to mold your destiny according to your will and reason.

So powerful a tool is there in the hands of the soul that a person can, by using his mind, attain the highest. But for most people the highest cannot be envisioned; human aspiration is very shallow. The blind man wanted only to have one eye. He didn't care whether he was born in a poor family or whether he had to endure miserable situations. The only thing that was important to him at the time was to have vision in one eye.

Let me give you another instance of mind's magic. In ancient times, ascetics, or persons practicing intense austerity, would wander about the countryside begging for food. One such ascetic knocked on the door of a house, hoping that the lady of the house would give him food. When she had done so, he said, "I am highly pleased. I shall bless you. May you become the mother of five sons."

The woman became extremely angry, saying, "Five sons! Why, I already have ten sons. What is this, a blessing or a curse?"

So you see that the ascetic's mind was limited in its understanding. Similarly, sometimes when you think you are blessing yourself you are actually cursing yourself. Much more is possible for your soul than your mind could ever imagine or desire.

Instead of desiring things and going after them, then, you should quietly explore your mind and allow it to unfold to its outer limits. That is, place before your mind the goal of Self-realization. Do not let ordinary desires guide your mental process. No matter what your desires may be, you are cursing yourself—you are placing limitations before yourself. No desire will lead you to the highest. The highest "desire" that should captivate your mind is the aspiration for Self-realization, where all your mental resources are explored and well-utilized.

A human being uses only a fragment of his mind in one lifetime. The mind can be compared

to a great iceberg: nine-tenths of it lies submerged, while only a tiny portion is visible above the surface of the water. And in the case of human beings, that which is revealed—the conscious mind—is continually being put under tremendous stress and tension over the most trivial matters. Such is the sad predicament for human beings.

Controlling the Mind

The most important step in working with and controlling your mind is to gain the keen insight that your goal is Self-realization. When you become Self-realized you are no longer dependent upon the body, the mind, the senses, or the ego. You are not individualized; you become universal, one with God. In the state of Self-realization all the desires of the mind are satisfied.

As you strive to control the mind it is important to understand that you are dealing with the mind on two levels: conscious and unconscious. The conscious mind is the mind that you know when you are awake. The unconscious represents a vast aspect of the mind that you do not know, and its workings play a great part in your life.

Because the unconscious affects you in a way that is powerful yet hard to fathom, you must be patient as you work to build happiness and joy in your life, and cultivate positive qualities in your personality. Suppose you decide to practice positive thinking for a few days, believing that everything is going to be rosy and sweet. Then, when you find that your optimistic view is not working out, you become frustrated. You should not, however, be frustrated or discouraged because your effort has affected your unconscious for the better—and it goes on doing so.

There are some well-evolved techniques that Sages have devised for helping one to handle the unconscious. Let me give you a few of these. The most important is the practice of meditation. Early in the morning, sit quietly and watch your mind. Train yourself to concentrate so that you may enter into the meditative state easily. As you practice day by day, you create new grooves, or impressions, in

your unconscious. Consequently you bring about a profound change in your personality.

The next is *japa*, which is repetition of a Divine Name, or repetition of a brief prayer that helps your mind build positive impressions. *Japa* is the most effective way of overcoming stress, pain, suffering, and frustration because it allows your mind to become aware of the Divine presence, to feel you are in touch with God.

When you begin to deeply feel that God is guiding you at all times, you become relaxed in any situation. You are no longer frightened by the unknown, nor frustrated when you see that developments in your life cannot be controlled by your ego. Developing that attitude of surrender is a great art. Whatever you do physically or mentally, feel that you are offering it to the God within you. So meditation, prayer, and a spirit of surrender in daily life are all powerful processes for changing your unconscious.

Vigilance is of utmost importance in one's daily life. Watch your mind just as you do objects in the world. Preserve your mental health as you would your favorite possessions. Most people do not value their mental health and stability. They are far more interested in the objects that clutter their lives. This is a strange predicament that is due to ignorance.

When you are alone, facing your own internal life, you should practice meditation and *japa*. You

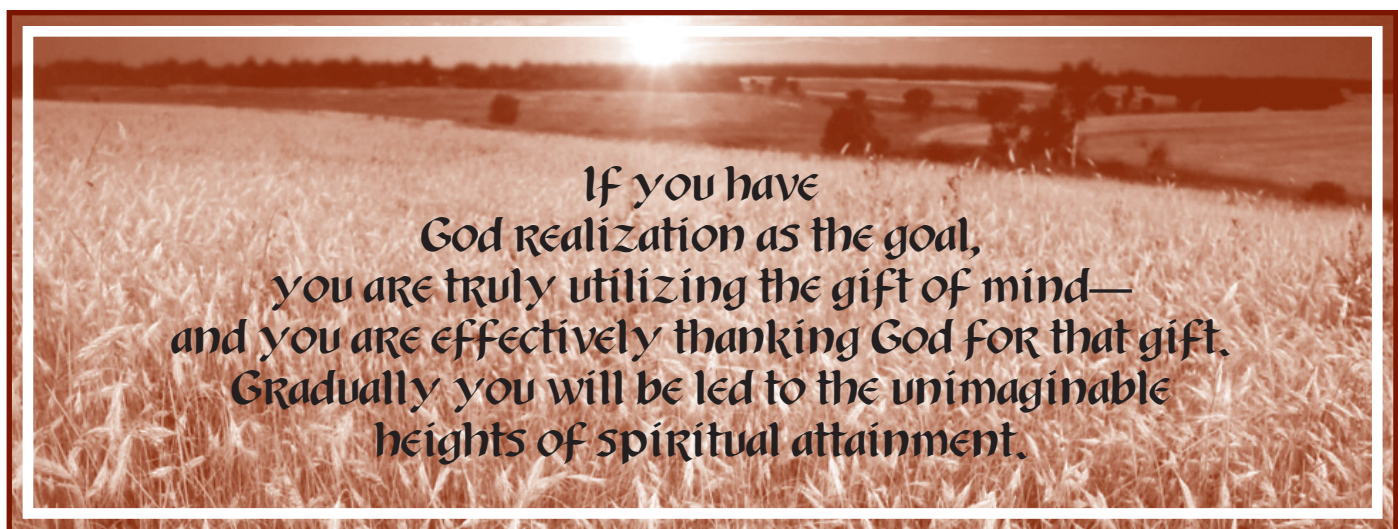
should relax with a spirit of surrender and study scriptures that elevate your mind.

Never let your mind go off on a negative tangent. Generally, whenever people are upset they sit with negative thoughts churning in the mind hour after hour. Such thinking continues to generate its impressions in the unconscious, reducing their willpower and weakening their minds.

If you see that you are overcome by negativity when you are alone, then you should take recourse to some kind of *satsanga* or good association with others in a setting where spiritual teachings are being given. Or you should be involved in work that takes you out of the negative aspect of mind.

When you are interacting with others, you must evolve an art of adapting and adjusting to the people around you. In daily life you come into contact with many different kinds of people; so you need to watch your mind as you react to them. This process of watching your mind with great vigilance is the greatest *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) that one can perform.

Most spiritual practitioners develop an eccentric view of *sadhana* and feel that if they get up early, and do their meditation, *japa*, and other similar practices, then they have done all they need to do in the name of *sadhana*. What difference does it make if they shout at people, hurt others' feelings, and never try to be adaptable?



Such people do not give importance to the art of adaptability because of the erroneous idea that *sadhana* and practical life are completely separate from each other. But this is not so. If you aspire to attain God-realization, to control your mind, then the world is your testing-ground. What you accomplish within yourself is tested every day in God's examination hall.

Suppose, for example, that early in the morning during your meditation you recognize the great beauty of humility and vow that you will be humble from then on. But then, later in the day, someone accidentally steps on your toes, causing you to lose your temper. Or someone praises you for doing a good job and this makes your head swell. Thus in the examination hall of daily life, when you see your ego being easily jarred by pleasure and pain, you realize that you have not yet become humble and you move onward with renewed effort.

When you see that you have failed in the practice of a virtue, you need not develop a sense of regret or repentance. Rather, simply look at your mind just as you would a malfunctioning computer or dishwasher and say, "Where has it gone wrong?" And you practice it again and again with increased vigilance until that virtuous quality is established in your personality.

The scriptures speak of four attitudes that one ought to adopt in dealing with other people. First, when you encounter people who are your peers, be friendly towards them. Refrain from developing jealousy towards them or gossiping about them. If your neighbor acquires a lot of money or attains some kind of success, don't feel, "I should have gotten that success. Why is it that he gets all that and not I?"

Do not search for some defect in your neighbor's lifestyle or personality that can make him look bad in everyone's eyes. When you find some mistakes in a person it gives you a kind of satisfaction. But that is the wrong way to use your mind. On the other hand, you should have thought, "Oh, I'll look upon his success much as I would if it was my younger brother who earned all that

money. His success is my success." This quality is termed *maitri* or friendliness.

The next attitude is called *karuna*, or compassion. When you see people struggling or making mistakes, you should not develop an attitude of superiority: "I am greater than they. I have done so much. These people have not worked hard or they are in a low level." Rather you should develop the compassionate insight that you also were in a similar situation in the process of your own evolution and probably even worse; yet you have evolved. Similarly, all these people are in the process of evolution. Further, who are you to judge them? It may seem to you that certain people are inferior to you, but in God's eyes they may be superior. So, keep your judgement to yourself, control yourself, and have compassion.

And when you come into contact with people who are highly advanced like Sages and Saints, you should feel a sense of joy. Since such persons have accomplished the goal of Self-realization, you too can do the same. All great men and women confirm your potentiality. This is called *mudita*, a spirit of joyousness toward superiors.

And when you come into contact with people who are gross or degraded, you should treat them with indifference, *upeksha*. Do not react to them at all. If such a degraded person were to come up to you and call you a "donkey," do not argue with him or try to convince him that you couldn't be a donkey! There is no need to say even one word. Just remain unmoved—as if he were talking to a wall.

If you adopt these four attitudes, handle your mind externally as well as internally, and have God-realization as the goal, then you are truly utilizing the gift of mind—and you are effectively thanking God for that gift. Even if you have attained a small degree of mental integration, that's a tremendous achievement. Gradually you will be led to the unimaginable heights of spiritual attainment.

