

Thanksgiving Message by Swami Jyotirmayananda



Fill Your Life with the Spirit of Thankfulness

NO MATTER what the historical reasons for the celebration of Thanksgiving Day in the United States might be, it is a glorious custom that can be observed by everyone in all parts of the world. Americans observe this day to count their blessings and express their thankfulness to God. With joyful exuberance they celebrate Thanksgiving with feasts and parties.

Aspiritual aspirant should not confine his grateful sentiments to Thanksgiving Day alone. He should learn to turn every day of his life into Thanksgiving Day. Further, he should understand the deeper meaning behind the manner in which God can be thanked. In fact, the spirit of thankfulness is a mode of constant remembrance of the Divine Self. While the West talks of thanking God, following their tradition, the East talks of remembering God at all times with a spirit of devotion and love. Both

are expressions of the same mystic movement of devotion to the Divine Self.

In common parlance, when you give thanks to someone for his kind deeds, you assert a sense of distance between yourself and the person who is thanked. Further, giving thanks has become a common form of courtesy. People often say, "Thanks," without meaning it. God should not be thanked with this superficial spirit.

God is the indweller of the heart in all living beings. He is the reality behind all names and forms. According to the philosophy of the Upanishads, He is like the shining sun, of whom the individual souls are but reflections caught in the illusions of time and space. All religious systems speak of man's essential unity with God, although they express it differently. Man is essentially Divine. To be thankful to God is to become aware of the essential Divine nature of one's own Self.

The masses need to count their reasons for giving thanks to God. They thank God for the birth of a son or a daughter, a gain in business, removal of an obstacle, the curing of a disease, attainment of prosperous conditions, or victory over inimical forces. But, aspirants learn to give thanks to God for this very human embodiment that is the basis for attaining Liberation, the goal of life. They give thanks to God for their ability to develop *viveka* (discrimination), *vairagya* (dispassion), spiritual aspiration for Liberation, and various other virtues.

Great Sage Shankaracharya proclaimed that three things are most rare in this world: *manushyatwam*, *mumukshutwam*, *mahapurushasamshyayah* (embodiment in a human body, aspiration for God-realization and association with the wise). Development of these is the best method of showing your thanks to God. Without adopting this inward movement of dispelling the darkness of ignorance, all expression of thankfulness becomes a form of hypocrisy.

You should be thankful to God because you are a human being. Do not waste time and energy over the trifles of the world. Discover the defects of worldly pleasures. Having thus understood the vanity of sense-enjoyments, you should turn your steps towards the practice of various aspects of Yoga in your daily life. Create an environment of Yogic movement and become a source of *satsanga* (good association) for others. This is a dynamic form of giving thanks to the Divine Self.

Japa (repetition of Divine Name), prayer, meditation on the Divine Self, and an effort to surrender your will to God in daily life—these are the secrets of observing thankfulness to God. Through these spiritual disciplines you will attain purity of mind and become increasingly aware of the Divine Presence operating through your personality.

A DEVOTEE proceeds towards the Divine Self in three stages, characterized by the following sentiments:

1) “I am His.”—This is the sentiment of surrendering yourself to God as a servant to a master. You consider yourself and all your belongings as the possessions of the Supreme Master, the Divine Self. As this sentiment continues to mature, with the increasing purification of the mind, you enter into the following stage.

2) “I am Thine.”—At this stage, you do not see God as a distant personality. You feel the closer

proximity of God. God can be loved as a friend, as the secret source of inner delight, or as the Supreme Beloved. With the intensification of this sentiment, you discover the following fact of spiritual existence.

3) “I am He.”—At this stage, you realize your inner identity with the Divine Self. The Divinity, whom you have adored through numerous embodiments, is the very essence of your being. The pleasures that you have been pursuing are expressions of the spiritual Bliss of your own inner Self. In fact, the objects, the conditions of pleasure and pain, the very world of time and space are all manifestations of the Divine Self through Cosmic Illusion (*Maya*). When the veil of *Maya* is lifted, you discover your identity with the Divine Self. This is indeed the highest consummation of all religious and mystic movements of the world.

Why should you have to count the blessings of God when you are surrounded by His Grace and immersed in His blessings? You should give thanks for the blue sky, the sun that rises each day and for all that is elevating and sublime. But, you should also give thanks for the dark clouds, the nights of despair and the rough winds of adversity. When the spirit of surrender unfolds in your being, you will discover a unique sense of Divine sweetness even in the adverse conditions of life, because you gain precious insight into the Divine meaning behind the apparent conditions of adversity.

Do not confine your thanks to words alone. Give up your attachments to the perishable objects of the world. Give up your expectation regarding the fruits of actions that you perform in your day-to-day life. Give up your very ego-sense; offer it as a flower at the Divine feet. Give your entire life as an offering to the Divine Self. Let your entire personality be filled with the spirit of thankfulness.

Serve God in humanity. Love Him in all human beings. Refrain from hurting others in thought, word or deed. Discover His presence within yourself as well as in others. Promote good association, spiritual enquiry and mental purification within yourself and promote goodness, courage and joyousness in others through your virtuous deeds. This is the best manner of observing Thanksgiving in your life. Thus you will have a life of perpetual festivity.

May God bless you!