

2020-11-22 Appreciation and Gratitude

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SPEAKERS

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So on this Sunday morning talk a few days before the holiday of Thanksgiving here in the United States, I want to talk a little bit about Thanksgiving, gratitude, thankfulness. I love the expression Thanksgiving because it kind of implies or kind of contains within it, both giving and receiving. We give thanks for the benefits we appreciate and the benefits we receive. And then we give the thanks. And this wonderful, circularity, mutuality of giving and receiving. And sometimes it's just a delight to receive thanks for something. It's an expression of appreciation and delight and value and even expression of kindness, to be thanked. And sometimes, of course, the thanks can be overdone, and maybe come with complicated baggage. But the simplicity of gratitude is just such a nice thing.

And in the myths of Buddhism there's a story of the Buddha. That after he was enlightened he spent seven days gazing much of the day, day and night, gazing at the tree, the Bodhi tree under which he was enlightened, in gratitude of the tree. Maybe the protection it gave and the support it gave him for this amazing experience of freedom, presence that he discovered. And the Buddha didn't teach much about gratitude. But he did say that wonderful statement that no one is injured in feeling gratitude. And this idea of no one is injured, you won't be injured in feeling gratitude. What a delightful idea. In the teachings of the Buddha there are two words that are almost always appear together. And they both relate to the word gratitude in English. Maybe there are two sides of what we would think of in English is gratitude. And the first one that's often referred to in the West referred to as gratitude and Pāli is kataññuta, k, a, t, a, n, n, u, t, a with the n the tilde. And literally what this word means is knowing what has been done. So it's a cognitive experience of knowing, recognizing what someone has done for oneself. What has been done for one. The second word almost as a compound because they appear together so often is kataveditā, k, a, t, a, v, e, d, i, t, a. And this means, the first part of it is the same as the other one. It means that which has been done. And veditā, kind of means to experience or to feel that which has been done that we feel. So this is more emotional. This is more the emotional feeling we get when something has been done for us, something beneficial. So the first is the recognition that what's been done. The second is the emotional impact of that how it opens our hearts, how it delights us, how it makes us smile, how it lifts us up, how it fills us maybe. And both of these are part of it. That gratitude is in a form of appreciation.

The dictionary definition that I have is that gratitude is the quality of being thankful, readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness readiness to to show appreciation. So there has to be appreciation first, and there has to be the recognition of what we've received. And this is a delightful exercise to spend time, maybe in the end of the day, I've done this sometimes. Sometimes I do, as I lay in bed, go to sleep, sometimes I do at my last meditation of the day. I'll just review the day, and appreciate all the good things that happened that day. And inevitably, I'm a little bit surprised by this exercise, that turns out, there was more things to appreciate through the day than I actually spend time appreciating. Because I'm just going to one thing to the next, and just not really not, sometimes not thinking about things too much. And then to review the day. And so I did it recently, recently. And last week I did a retreat. And at the end of the day, I did this, this exercise, and I kept going, Wow, wow, wow. And they weren't like dramatic things. Just small things that I could feel appreciate. And it's a wonderful exercise. And the idea of doing it is not to do it's kind of forcefully or artificially or pretend things are better than they are. The idea is to really reflect on what we genuinely and easily appreciate. And it's a skill that's developed over time because there's a lot of things going on in daily life that maybe we generally kind of take for granted and don't think about. Then we start kind of reflecting in this way. We start slowly, maybe over time, we recognize, Oh, yeah, there's that too. There's that too. And realizing there's more and more and more people to appreciate more things to appreciate that we get. And then in from that appreciation, one of the things that we gather, what comes from that is gratitude. As a feeling of thankfulness. And gratitude can be an expression that is not expressed. And it's just something we feel inside, it's more than one of the most common emotions I have, at the end of a meditation session. I feel both great appreciation and I feel gratitude. And it's not something that I'm working on to have, it just kind of wells up for me at the end. And one of the reasons I like to bow at the end of meditation practice is to give expression to that. It doesn't have to be expressed, but it's so nice to. It's like my system wants that energy to flow out or not be bottled up or something. And so, this kind of bow is a very simple expression of appreciation and gratitude for me. And so one of the reasons I like that Buddhist custom of bowing, because it seems like a whole body kind of coming together in a kind of, the hands together, whole body kind of coming together to appreciate. So the appreciation is like more embodied, more complete than simply saying to someone, I appreciate you.

So gratitude. To contrast it with greed, gratitude is expressed in the words, thanks. Greed is expressed in the words more or have, get. And I think of greed as kind of a state of lack of not being complete, of something is missing and cut off from oneself probably to some degree. And I think of gratitude as being the kind of more closer to being complete, being receptive, being open, having enough, being grateful for what we have. As opposed to greedy for what we don't have. To be grateful for what we have, instead of being proud of what we have. Very different sentiments, very different ways of being.

And I think that to be grateful and appreciative, we have to be a little bit comfortable with ourselves. We have to be not feeling anxious or insecure or feeling a sense of lack. But even if we feel just a little bit of it, to open ourselves up and and appreciate the gifts that are given appreciate what's happening for us also contributes to a sense of comfort. Greed, I don't think it leads to much comfort. It might lead to pleasure. But often, it's a pleasure that kind of calls for more pleasure. And so this state of being complete, being full, being whole, that I associate much more with appreciation and gratitude. Gratitude is having a new vision of our world. It's not necessarily living in a new world. It's not like living in a new

reality, a new kind of place. But it's taking the world we live in and seeing it in a new way. Seeing it with more appreciation and seeing with more gratitude.

Then it's easy to complain and say, well, there's a lot of things not to appreciate, and we're supposed to not appreciate them. And complain about them or be upset with them, and all kinds of things go on. And so maybe there's some truth to that, I don't want to deny that. But it's also important to reflect on the consequences of complaining the consequences of anger and despair, that are very different than the consequences of appreciation. That the appreciation of things tends to support the growth of those things we appreciate. appreciation is a kind of food for things. And so there's kind of a positive reinforcement. And people really benefit, the world benefits from a lot of positive reinforcement. So if there's genuine appreciation, genuine gratitude, in the right way and the right amount, it's a fantastic thing to offer gratitude. I generally think in our society, that maybe in many societies, but certainly where I live and around, that gratitude is kind of under utilized expression of mutuality, of care, of kindness. And to be more thankful. To make it more second nature to be thankful.

There was someone who once said that real gratitude is to pause in front of reality. To pause to because you have to. It's a moment to take something in. If we're always going and getting and wanting or running away, there's very little opportunity to appreciate. But to pause long enough, to receive long enough to recognize what's happening, that we're receiving goodness, receiving something beneficial. To pause in front of reality is a time to be more open to reality, more open to see it in a new way. We able to take our time to experience it a new way. And this is one of the reasons why meditation is so useful. Maybe meditation can be seen as one long pause in front of reality. And maybe one long pause to bow in front of reality, in the presence of reality and appreciation and gratitude. I think that gratitude is a reasonable response to reality. Entitlement is not. To feel like we're entitled to things. Again, it closes the doors, it closes the possibilities of deep appreciation and gratitude. I think the deeper the appreciation, the less maybe we need to have, the less we need to prove. The less we need to assert ourselves because something beautiful is being filling us and supporting us and nourishing us.

So gratitude is also a practice. And it's inspired practice. It's a practice that can inspire, bring a lot of joy, a lot of delight. And it has these two steps. First we have to recognize, know what it is that we've received. And then we appreciate that with a feeling with an emotional feeling. And what exactly the emotional feeling is of appreciating what we have received maybe varies from time to time, situation to situation, from person to person. But maybe it's something that makes the heart sing. That makes the heart feel overflowing, makes the heart feel delighted. And it allows something to kind of open and feel complete. That's a wonderful.

Anyway. So to practice it. Gratitude is a choice. And I know when I was younger, the idea of exercising choice to me seemed artificial. Seemed like I should just go along and just be present for things as they are. But that's a choice too. And there is a natural way, naturalness to choosing to focus on what we appreciate, partly as a counter to the strong tendency many people seem to have towards a negative bias towards things. And so instead of a negative bias, to choose a positive bias. And initially it might be a choice that takes a little bit of work and have to remember to do it. But over time, there's more and more, becomes more and more second nature. And imagine yourself walking through this world

appreciating things left and right, in front and behind. Beginning by appreciating the person you're with, maybe even a stranger, instead of beginning with caution, fear, wanting, closing down all these things that we might do. But appreciation is a kind of pause before that person, a taking in of the person, a valuing of the person that we're with. And not coming directly with our agenda, our purpose, but we want to pause in front of reality so that we have time to appreciate the goodness of it, the specialness, the gift of it, of time, of reality.

So part of the reason to practice gratitude, appreciation, is that the receptivity, the pause that that entails. It's hard to imagine Dharma practice unfolding very deeply and fully without it. To practice the Dharma is also in a certain way, to pause in the midst of reality. It's also to be receptive to something. And many people that I know including myself, as Dharma practice has developed, all the goodness that comes from it has really felt like a gift. Rather than something that I orchestrate, that I deserve, that I've done, that I make happen and look how great I am. The deeper I've been impacted by the Dharma, the more I feel it's a wonderful gift. Even states like concentration, I don't take them for granted that I can get concentrated. But when I do, I just go Wow, what a great gift. I just received this wonderful thing. And now let's appreciate it and open to it and experience it's a more.

So to take time to exercise that choice. So being appreciative, recognizing what's been done for us. And there's, you know, most of the you know, most of what we see and touch those of us living in developed civilized urban environment. Someone has touched, someone has designed, someone has built, someone is placed there. And even if the slightest little way in which we benefit from it being there, the sidewalks we walk on. And someone has laid the sidewalks down, made it easier for us to walk safely rather than walking in the street. As much as we might, some of us might have some questions and maybe a little caution around the whole world of technology. We benefit so much from electricity and electrical lines and all these kinds of things that we have. And it's so easy to take the whole day for granted. When the whole day, we are the beneficiary of so much that's been done for our well being.

So not to live a life for granted. Not to habituate ourselves so much by our desires, our wants, our distractions, our fears. That we don't pause enough to receive, to recognize the gifts. The benefits to appreciate And to live a life inspired by gratitude. And may it be that we practice out of gratitude. It's one of the great fuels for practice is gratitude, gratitude for all we're given.

When I was practicing in Burma, and other places in Asia, and also here in United States, I've been the recipient of people's support, one way or the other for my practice. And it's just been a delight for me to give myself over a little bit more to my practice. When I practice sincerely, to be worthy of the gifts that I got, a gratitude for the gifts that I got. And I mentioned Burma because I remember there was an older lady who came and gave me a little bit of chocolate. She seemed quite poor to me, but she wanted to support the foreigner who was practicing in her country. And she gave me a little piece of chocolate. And I was so inspired by this woman making this little act of generosity. And I went back to my room to continue my day's meditation. And I felt kind of fueled and buoyed from her generosity, and really wanted to practice even more, better, in a sense, in a good way, to be worthy of that to really continue that way.

Two Sides of gratitude. Buddhist idea of gratitude. One is to recognize what has been done for us. And the other is to have that impact our hearts, our emotional life, our feelings, to have a feeling from that. And then we add to that the third part that's optional, and needs to be done to some wisdom. And that is to express that gratitude. Thank you. So I certainly want to thank all of you. And thank you for this Sunday sittings. And I really feel, I feel supported, I feel inspired, that you all come and we have this time together Sunday morning to sit then and explore the Dharma. And it's a great benefit for me in my life. And I want to thank you, and I look forward to seeing you next week. And I thought that next week, maybe we could have a community meeting afterwards. And I'll post the zoom address closer to the time and then I'll put it up in the What's New section of IMC and IMC calendar, and also it'll be in the chat here. So they'll be different ways of getting the zoom link. When we finish here around 10:30 next week, then we can have a community meeting and I can answer answer questions or have some discussion and we'll do some breakout groups as well. So you get to meet each other and talk and such things. So thank you and I wish you all well.