

Peace of Mind Through Gratitude and Giving

By Reverend Jaganath Carrera

Peace of Mind Through Gratitude and Giving

Gratitude is an inborn quality of the human heart. It is the natural reaction when given a gift that brings us benefit. "Thank you" naturally rises from the heart to the lips when we are moved by someone's act of kindness towards us, their thoughtfulness, or their generosity. In this simple, yet profound interaction, we experience a beautiful depth of human relationship. We feel connected to the giver in an intimate and special way. It is, in fact, a taste of the oneness that is the ultimate truth behind all names and forms.

Part of the power of gratitude is that it naturally inspires us to be givers. The first gift we give is the spontaneous expression of gratitude. But true gratitude doesn't stop there. It is a seed that seeks to find a place to grow and expand. We are inclined to 'pass on' the act of giving to another. When we truly give, without expectation of any reward or even a thank you, we experience the great joy and love of that is part and parcel of giving. Bonds of ignorance and selfishness that have obscured our experience of our True Nature begin to dissolve. We begin to understand why it is said that it is better to give than receive. The giver receives more than the recipient. Selfless giving brings peace, joy, love, and understanding. We become aligned to the Cosmic Will that knows only giving. We become instruments in the hands of the Divine.

Since gratitude opens our hearts in a deep way, it puts us more in touch with powerful, but unnoticed parts of the mind. We are more open to the subtle movements of the subconscious mind. We come to know ourselves better: our motivations, fears, weaknesses, and strengths.

Practicing gratitude can also help heal relationships and makes new, meaningful and fruitful ones more possible. To feel gratitude for a gift is universal. It cuts across generational, gender, religious, and social lines. It is a point of unity that is powerful, and transformative. Gratitude is a clear, open vessel through which love and caring flows. That is why it also extends to a deeper, richer; a more functional and meaningful relationship with our planet.

Gratitude and Yoga - In Action

Lead a sacrificial life. To sacrifice means to bring wholeness, holiness, and harmony. We can all give to others in our family, circle of friends to our co-workers, to the company that pays our wages, to the planet. We can dedicate our energy in the form of prayers for peace and healing, for supporting what we see as good. We can volunteer time to organizations that exist for the betterment of others. We can donate some of our income to those organizations as well. The most powerful form of financial giving is tithing. It deserves a closer look.

Tithing

A tithe is a "first fruit" offering to God. That means that before we acknowledge anything or anyone else, pay any bills or make any purchases, our

gratitude is expressed to God through regular financial offerings to a spiritual or religious organization. Tithing is the recognition that all that we have, enjoy, and benefit from come from One Source. Our material wealth, home, partner, friends, children, and family are given to us as gifts. Even our bodies and minds are gifts from the Absolute. The only proper response to being given a gift is gratitude expressed to the giver.

Tithing is different than a donation to charity (a wonderful act, considered as essential to spiritual growth). Tithing to a spiritual organization is a practice of *ishwara pranidhana* - putting the Highest first, putting our lives in harmony with the Source of Life and the Divine Will that animates everything.

Certainly, tithing helps support the organization (society, sangha, etc) that supports your spiritual growth. Since we have received much from the organization, it is appropriate to give back. It is a way to avoid spiritual debt.

Tithing is also an incredibly effective and powerful tool for attaining prosperity. Just like it is natural for us to give to someone who has given much to us, it is Nature's law that those that give, receive. There are many, many stories of people who have salvaged their financial lives through tithing. But it can't be done with the thought of manipulating God's laws. The intent of the tither is simply to give out of love and gratitude. Giving is a one-way street.

The amount of the tithes was traditionally 10% of gross income (the word tithes literally means 1/10), but it need not be so. The idea is that the amount should not be given from excess (though that will certainly still benefit the recipient, it does not bring the same benefits to us). It isn't easy to choose to make a regular contribution that doesn't have an immediately visible return. Tithing should not be an unreasonable or oppressive process. Instead, it is meant to encourage a certain degree of sacrifice and reflection.

Tithing challenges us to examine and assess our priorities and decisions. We take the opportunity to examine our lives: what's necessary, what's not, and what seems to be somewhere in the middle. We simplify our lives, shedding that which is unnecessary and burdensome. Doing with a little less is a great way to practice the renunciation of selfishness and craving that is necessary to attain Self-realization.

In tithing, we are participating in the sacrificial process that is at the core of all life. God sacrifices Oneness in order to create. The Mother Nature sacrifices its food, wood, stone, and all other resources for us. Parents sacrifice for the sake of their children. The sun sacrifices its warmth and light so that we can live. Sacrifice is the law of life. Tithing puts us in closer harmony with that law and thereby brings incredible benefit.

Reflect on this story, one of Gurudev Satchidananda's favorites. It is from the Mahabharata.

A great and holy sage, well known for his powerful performance of sacrificial rituals had just finished performing a homa (fire ceremony). Soon

afterward, a mongoose came scampering up to the now cool ashes. What immediately struck the sage was that the mongoose's fur was half brown and half the most startling gold. The mongoose eagerly rolled himself in the ashes and got up to leave, looking very disappointed. The sage, intrigued by this, asked the tiny animal what he was doing and how did he come to have such unusual and striking golden fur over half of his body.

"Well sir, I have been traveling so many years looking to turn all my fur gold. Years ago I wandered into a tiny shack looking for something to eat. I saw on the floor an entire family that had died. In the corner, under a table I spotted some flour. It was too little to eat, but I thought I could roll in it and get some relief from the itching of fleabites. To my surprise, wherever the flour touched my fur it turned gold. I knew that something special had happened here. I was uplifted by that, and became obsessed to find something somewhere else that would turn all my fur golden."

"My tiny friend, I know the little shack, the people who lived there, and what happened. It was the home of a righteous, loving family. It was the time of a great famine. Hunger and poverty were everywhere. The family was near dying of starvation when the father found a bit of day labor and earned just enough money to buy flour for four rotis (flatbreads) - one for each member of the family.

The mother lovingly made the four rotis, but before they sat down to eat, they dutifully observed the tradition of looking outside their home to see if anyone was coming by who needed something to eat. They spotted a sadhu (wandering holy man) and asked if he was hungry."

"Yes, kind sir, I am."

The mother lovingly offered the sadhu a roti. When he was done, the mother asked if he was still hungry.

"Yes, mother I am."

"So he was served another. Then another, and then the fourth and last one. He thanked the family and left. Having no food, and not having eaten in so long, each family member fainted and quietly passed away. Their piety goes infinitely farther and deeper than my little homa. Your fur turned gold because of their extraordinary generosity, their faith, their unbounded spirit of giving and dedication. Such true holiness is truly rare."

To give selflessly is the most powerful and practical of all practices. It brings peace and joy in infinite measure and does so immediately. Each selfless act is a joy for the giver as well as to the receiver. Dedicated living is greater than

Hatha Yoga, meditation, worship, and study. No philosophy, no practice is greater. The selfless heart becomes a pure reflection of the Divine. It can take courage and faith to give with such selflessness, but it is well worth the practice. Try it for a week. Make this week a selfless week. For this week live for the sake of others. See how peaceful and joyful your mind will become.