

The Transformational Power of Gratitude

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When you think of Thanksgiving, what images cross your mind? A decadent and treasured gathering of your relatives at Grandmother's house? Maybe it's listening to the same family stories year after year, like when you were six and you stole the bowl with black olives off of the neatly set table, hid under the table, and then proceeded to eat the entire contents of the bowl before getting caught? (Okay, I own that story.) Perhaps your memories are not quite as heart-warming or mischievous as that, but Thanksgiving offers us a buffet of memories that mix the savory, sweet, and sometimes distasteful all together.

I have always believed that Thanksgiving should be subtitled as the Day of Familial Amnesty, where families travel great lengths (both literally and figuratively) to be together in all their blissfully diverse or strident discord. It is that sacred holiday which is the closest thing we have to a national holy day, and its rituals include a sacrificial turkey with all the obligatory accoutrements, giving thanks for the copious amounts of food that we will later regret consuming, welcoming of friends and strangers to the communal table, and a large portion of State of the Union conversation.

This year, if you happen to be among the many who are anticipating family dysfunction at its worst, may I suggest that you pack the following into your personal pharmacopeia for survival: Extra blood pressure medication, anti-political-nausea pills, perhaps some Xanax to go with that extra helping of crazy that gets passed along with the gravy, and a healthy dose of Forgetfulness syrup to help you forget all the things you'd like to say, but you know would contribute to overall indigestion if unleashed.

All levity aside, the fact is most of us **love** Thanksgiving. Wherever we Americans are in the world, we are like homing pigeons—longing to gather around our national altar of blessing with loved ones, friends, or even strangers. It is a sensual smorgasbord of familiar smells, tastes, sights, sounds, and hugs, all mixed together with the strength and fragility of imperfect relationships. It is important for us to remember that we do not need to be perfect, to be perfectly loved. And others do not need to be perfect, for us to perfectly love them.

Around the Thanksgiving table, we are one American family...immeasurably diverse in every possible way, and at the same time equally grateful for the blessings of food and freedom and another hand to hold on this journey through life. Consider this to be our annual, federally sanctioned, “kumbaya” moment.

Around the Thanksgiving table we are reminded of loved ones who are no longer with us, of children that are growing up too fast, of generational changes and our place on that continuum. We are wondering how the new significant other we are introducing to the family will be received. **We are desiring to be accepted for who we are, for what we believe, for our own gifts and talents, our own life choices, and for our very real fears and concerns.** And we want all that with a healthy amount of laughter, a modicum of warm fuzzies, and a piece of pumpkin pie with a scoop of full-fat, vanilla bean ice cream, thank you very much. *We certainly pack a whole lot of emotional stuffing in that turkey, don't we?!*

Given the unprecedented and pervasive angst of this post-election season, I dare say that many of us are legitimately concerned about the pink political elephant (that may or may not have orange hair) that will undoubtedly be sitting at the table on Thursday. Instead of looking for it, expecting it, and arming yourself with pink elephant repellent, may I suggest that you remember what day it is, and put your **attention and intention** on that.

What makes Thanksgiving so important is that for *one day* it seeks to remind us that we *are one people*, all trying to survive the challenges set before us, pausing to offer gratitude for the life that we share which transcends politics and all the isms that sometimes separate us. When we put our **attention and intention** on counting our blessings, we increase our gratitude quotient, and love and kindness grows. Indeed, the transformational power of gratitude can change our immediate world in profound ways. The secret is to practice it every day.

When we offer gratitude to another person, it blesses both the receiver and the giver. (Just look at the picture on the Order of Service. Love and gratitude. Love and gratitude.) Real gratitude comes from an authentic place, and it has been shown to improve psychological, emotional, and physical health. It is nonjudgmental. It does not expect anything in return. Yet, at the same time, it expands feelings of well-being. An expression of gratitude is really saying, “**You matter, and I appreciate you.**” Quoting one of our favorite UU mantras: *We don't need to think alike to love alike.*

Scientific research has proven that there is a tremendous transformative power that exists when gratitude is emoted and received, and it actually creates physiological changes in living matter.

There was a very interesting study done in the last half of the 20th century by Dr. Masaru Emoto from Yokohama University in Japan. *Dr. Emoto believed that water was a "blueprint for our reality" and that emotional "energies" and "vibrations" could change the physical structure of water. Emoto's water crystal experiments consisted of exposing water in glasses to different words, pictures or music, and then freezing and examining the aesthetic properties of the resulting crystals with microscopic photography. Emoto made the claim that water exposed to positive speech and thoughts would result in visually pleasing crystals being formed when that water was frozen, and that negative intention would yield "ugly" frozen crystal formations.*

[Wikipedia] Indeed, his experiments proved his theory to be correct 100% of the time.

Consider, then, that we humans are made of 50% to 60% water. Then, consider the importance of the tone of your words, of the power of your gratitude on your body, on your food, on the people around you. Do not underestimate the transformational power of gratitude in your life.

Counting our blessings on a daily basis helps us to foster a more thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. In order to feel grateful, we must be present in the moment...eyes, mind, and heart fully open. Even in the midst of the most challenging times in your life, if all that you can say is “*thank you for this breath that I take....thank you for the person who prepared this food that I eat,*” then you are already changing your world. If you just stop and take a moment to consider this life-altering power that you have ever ready at your disposal, then I suggest you bring **that** to your Thanksgiving table this year.

And so on this Thanksgiving Day, let us join hands and say grace, acknowledging our **thankfulness** for another year of living, for the blessings of life, for the food that nourishes us and the love of family and friends that sustains us. And when we look around that table, let us also remember that we do not need to be perfect to be perfectly loved, and others do not need to be perfect for us to perfectly love them. Then give the pink political elephant the afternoon off so it can take a turkey tryptophan nap on the couch in the other room. The work of our hands and our hearts will be waiting for us the next morning along with an extra pound or two.

Amen and Blessed Be