

Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

September-October 2024



Gratitude As a Spiritual Practice

With Thanksgiving coming up later in the fall, I thought we might consider the depth of our giving thanks. Of our gratitude.

Truly practicing gratitude can be a journey of realizing that, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, we are in the lap of an immense intelligence. And we are in that lap together, in our connectedness.

Could we consider making gratitude a spiritual practice? One that gets along well with our zen practice? Practice can wake up a sense of gratitude. Expressing gratitude takes the ego down a notch and can rein in our self-importance. The development of awareness and gratitude have seemed to go together for me, over the many years.

If you're old enough, you'll remember the "Me" generation—individualism, the Marlboro man (remember him?), doing our own thing, standing

2024 Sesshin Dates

December 27-31 2024

<https://zencentersandiego.org/schedule/sesshin.php>

Wednesday Programming for October

<https://www.zencentersandiego.org/>

The Sexual Misconduct
Complaint Procedure
and Code of Ethical

alone and doing it ourself. I went that route. And there can be a real downside to that. We see ourselves as loners, lonely, standing outside, not nestled in community, not nestled in the natural world.

But we *are* nestled—in a family, an environment, a world, an atmosphere, a history even. Being unnestled, unmoored, can be a sad place, an unhappy state of mind.

There's so much in life that supports us. You've probably heard the saying, "Standing on the shoulders of thousands" or, "Standing on the shoulders of giants." Reflecting on this, practicing with this, coming to feel and know this, we could consider gratitude practice. We wouldn't be where we are now without this myriad support. Acknowledging this is gratitude practice.

From the Bodhisattva's Vow:

"[The realization of the awakened way] teaches us that our daily food, drink, clothes, and protections of life are the warm flesh and blood, the merciful incarnation of the Awakened Life. Who can be ungrateful or not respectful, even to senseless things, not to speak of humans?"

Sometimes, that merciful manifestation is a difficult situation. Yet we might see how that situation is helpful.

Really, there's so much to be grateful for: spouses, partners, friends, moms, dads, grandparents, uncles, aunts, kids (the joy, the pain). The good, the bad, and the ugly—they all add up to our spiritual development, our maturation.

Our spiritual teachers—without them, we wouldn't be here. Every kind of teacher or mentor we've ever had, giving their caring, time, energy and patience to teach us, equip us to beneficially go forth in our life. They enlarged our world.

I wouldn't be here without the training, skill, dedication, and caring of many doctors, nurses, technicians, over years.

What about the farmers—the planters, the cultivators, the pickers—and the shippers, the sellers?

Conduct for Teachers/Practice Leaders can be found on the ZCSD website under "Policies." <http://www.zencentersandiego.org/Policies/>

"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."

We're grateful to our pets—maybe the only ones who listen to us all the time, are happy to see us, all the time. They make us laugh, even when we don't feel like laughing.

We might be grateful to the bullies who knocked us down and forced us to fight back, giving us the courage and strength to better meet the challenges we would later face in life. Thank you to the bullies? We might be grateful to the mean people who insulted us, demeaned us, and wanted to make our lives as hard as they possibly could. Maybe over time we learned to have compassion for them because we realized they suffered more than we did. Whatever was eating at them was harder than what we had to experience.

More and more we can realize that we would not be here today were it not for every single thing that happened in our lives, call it good or bad. Though we might have hated it at the time, now we might see it was grace.

Our zen practice, our zazen, can open us up to allow the spirit of gratitude in. A quiet, energetic attention to this moment is our offering to that spirit. It might only ask that we have the aspiration to give it back to a world that could really use it. Having gratitude is unifying.

We can start, or end, the day considering and stating to ourselves what we are grateful for. We can take this a long way, to the point where we're grateful for everything, realizing that everything is connected. Ultimately we can realize appreciation for everything.

So, doesn't this lead us into the phrase, "Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever"?

It's taken me some years of practice, and living, to begin to feel the truth of this. It continues to develop. We can't expect to just jump into this and genuinely feel gratitude for those things we genuinely don't feel grateful for. We always need to be honest with ourselves. Really difficult things can happen and we might say, "I hate this." The practice is always to notice our thoughts about something and experience the emotions and body sensations. This is the reality of the moment. In

time, with our subsequent evolution, we may gain insight that this was an event to be grateful for. Or, at least, we may find that our relationship to it has changed enough that it no longer blocks our capacity for gratitude.

Now, when I am able to see a difficulty more clearly, I can better recall those words "Thank you for everything ...," and the way forward can be more skillful.

When self-centered thought rises up and puts a film of separation over the world, I can better watch and experience exactly that and have some trust, faith, and express some appreciation with those words, for being able to see and feel what's happening.

When I can be fully present to the birds, trees, and flowers as I walk or look out the window, and there is joy, the words can be there.

We could start the day with an expression of gratitude that might go something like this. Make up your own version.

*Thank you for this new day,
And the opportunities it offers.
May we be healed in our difficulties,
And may we realize this awakened life, together.
May all beings find peace and fulfillment.*

Sometimes it could include more:

*May I turn my attention and aspiration toward
developing
The heart of appreciation,
A companion to the joy of life.
Let me appreciate the wonder and the mystery.
May I appreciate the journey—the ups,
downs, arounds,
And how that dynamic helps us mature.
And appreciate being able to just rest in what's
happening.*

Just that experiencing.

Being able to take helpful action, for myself and others.

Grateful for the ability to open to this moment,

Quieting, and allowing the intelligence that we are

To reveal the heartfelt way forward.

Our teachings speak of oneness, non-separateness. That the essence of humans, plants, animals, and matter are one with God, with All That Is, or Great Spirit, or this Awakened Life.

It seems this provides a good basis for our gratitude. That everything has a sacred essence. We're not separate from the sacred. The third ancestor, in our reading "Relying on Heartmind," reminds us how easily we can lose sight of this—falling into clinging and loathing, attachment and aversion, and separating heaven and earth.

—Chuck Sweet

To enjoy the world without judgment is what a realized life is like.

Joko Beck
