

Giving Thanks

November 25, 2014

We realize that when we're meditating, we're doing a lot of the work ourselves but we're depending on a lot of other people, too.

The fact that we have a body we got from our parents, that has been fed both by our parents and by other people; and that we've come quite a long ways on our own past good actions: You should have gratitude for all these things.

The Pali word for gratitude, *kataññu*, means literally "having a sense of what was done." It's different from appreciation: You can appreciate the trees and the sky, but they're not doing anything specific to help you. Gratitude is for cases where someone went out of their way to do something good that helped you. That requires a special appreciation on your part, more than just ordinary appreciation.

You have to realize that this is how we live in this world: not only through our own efforts but also through the kind efforts of others. If you have a sense of that, then you're more likely to go out of your way to help other people, too. That's why they say that gratitude is a sign of a good person.

So try to think of all the people who've helped you and how much you depend on their help—and how much they had to go out of their way.

It starts of course with your parents and then it spreads out to all the people who've taught you and helped you in other ways.

And how to do you repay that debt? Well, one, you try to be a good person, too. If you can repay the debts directly to them, that's fine. If not, then you can spread some of that goodness out in the world, and of course that goodness will rebound back to their credit as well. After all, they shaped you into becoming a good person and this is one of the influences that they still have in the world: the goodness you do.

So we're in this week, the week of Thanksgiving: It's important to think about to whom we should really be grateful. Anybody who's helped us we should be grateful for. Anybody's who's gone out of their way to do things that have helped us—either in a material way or in terms of understanding the Dhamma: We want to appreciate the actions they did, realize that they sometimes had to make a lot of effort.

Raising a child is not an easy thing. Living in this world as a human being is not an easy thing. So you should have gratitude also for your own good actions in the past. That means: Don't waste them. We have this human birth: Don't waste it. Make sure you put it to good use: your body, your words, your deeds.

As Ajaan Lee used to say, "Bow down to your mouth every day." You have a human mouth. It took a lot of merit to get a human mouth. So use it well.

With all your other abilities, you have to appreciate that these came through the difficulties of good actions. To show your gratitude for that, you want to use those abilities in a way that's really for your good and for the good of others.

That's how we can continue to live in this world—how we can live at peace and practice the Dhamma.