

[Two Powers: Gratitude and Appreciation](#)

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## Two Powers: Gratitude and Appreciation

"Some people complain because God put thorns on roses. Others praise Him for putting roses among thorns."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Much of life today is based on depreciation and denigration of public leaders, groups, governments, religions, corporations and even family members. This is negative living, always pointing out faults in no uncertain terms and ignoring the virtues. A Hawaiian civic leader lamented to us recently that people are cruel in their complaints. "It's ok to criticize, but they should be kindly when doing so!"

A story I was told decades ago relates. A guru was sitting with two disciples under a sprawling banyan tree in India. The older student inquired, "Guruji, how long must I wait until I realize God?" The teacher responded, "Enlightenment is not something that can be predicted, but since you have asked," he leaned over and spoke in the right ear, "it will be twenty more lives." "Oh, no!" the youth cried in dismay, "I don't know if I can wait that long!" The other follower, naturally curious, asked of his own future. The guru whispered, "Liberation will come after you live as many lives as this banyan has leaves!"

Hearing this, the seeker jumped to his feet and began to dance. Why? He was suddenly overtaken with the assurance that he would ultimately be liberated. Ecstatic with appreciation, he transcended the mind and attained his Liberation that very moment. The first student was on the path of depreciation. For him, the pot was half empty. For the second, immersed in thankfulness, the pot was half full.

Appreciation is a beautiful, soulful quality available to everyone in every circumstance: being thankful for life's little treasures, grateful for the opportunity to begin the day where you are, appreciating the perfect place your karma and God's grace has brought you to. Appreciation is life-giving. Depreciation without appreciation is heartlessly destructive. Yet, it is the all-too-common way of our times. When something is done that is good, helpful or loving, it is often overlooked, treated as something expected. No acknowledgement is shown, no gratitude expressed. But if a shortcoming is seen, everyone is swift to point it out!

The Vedas, the Tirukural and our many other holy texts indicate a better way. The wise ones knew that all humankind possesses freedom of choice and the willpower to use it. Today that freedom is usually used, unwisely, to downgrade others as well as oneself. Ignorance seems to be almost as all-pervasive as God. We find it everywhere and within every situation. It does not have to be this way.

Gratitude is a quality of the soul. It does not depend on how much we possess. It's opposite, ingratitude, is a quality of the external ego. When we abide in soul consciousness, we give

thanks for whatever we have, no matter how little or how much. When in ego consciousness, we are never grateful or satisfied, no matter how much we have.

I have faith in human integrity, in that unfailing "still, small voice of the soul" which each who listens for can hear. We are essentially pure souls temporarily living in a physical body. We can and should use our God-given gift of free will encased in love to make a difference in the world today, even if it is in a small way. All of us making the same difference together do so in a big way. Sishyas should be grateful to their gurus, husbands to their wives, wives to their husbands, both to their children, students to their teachers and teachers to their students. It's far more effective to praise others and appreciate what we have than to find fault and complain about what we don't have!

Gratitude and appreciation are the key words for a better life. They are the spell that is cast to dissolve hatred, hurt and sadness, the medicine which heals subjective states of mind, restoring self-respect, confidence and security. Shall we review them one at a time and consider a practice, a sadhana, for each?

First, gratitude. It is a feeling within the heart that we cannot suppress for long when overcome with abundant memories of all the good that has come into our lives. Most often, people remember the bad happenings, perhaps because they make the deepest impressions in the subconscious and are not expected. Good happenings are expected and, therefore, tend to be overlooked. The sadhana here is to take out paper and

pen and list all the good that has come into your life during the past five years. The list will grow as memory is stimulated. Should it not be possible to think of even one good thing, then write the affirmation several times, "I am a spiritual being of light maturing in the ocean of experience." Soon a good memory will come up followed by more. Feelings of loving appreciation will begin to flow toward those who participated in the good times. Forgiveness then wells up for the bad times. Amazingly, on the day I was writing these thoughts down an island person handed me a paper on which was written this wisdom from the great Catholic mystic Meister Eckhart, "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

Now let's look at appreciation, turning our thanks toward the people in our lives. The sadhana of appreciation is to approach those you are grateful to and tell them, to their face, while looking deep into their eyes, how much you esteem and value them. Be specific. Find details to share so they know this is not a shallow compliment. Explain what each one has done to inspire this loving confrontation and convince each in turn that you are sincere. The look of a full smiling face, eyes shining and heart full of love, is convincing enough in itself. Words of appreciation are words people do not often hear. These confrontations do not happen nearly often enough among friends and relatives in today's world. Loving appreciation is a life-changing force just waiting to be used. Appreciate community leaders, business associates, spiritual mentors, family members as often as you can. Loving appreciation is a magic formula that works both ways. When we commend another, we are automatically uplifted.

Here's a true story. A young man tried the above practice on his rather gruff employer, whose heart melted when he heard the words, "One of the things that I appreciate most about you, sir, is your brilliance as an inventor. You have so much to teach me." After saying that and more, the youth urged the astonished elder to pass on the voicing of appreciation to another person. The man sat with his son that same evening and awkwardly told him how much he appreciated his only son's many fine qualities. "I never take time to share these things. I tend to keep to myself and be demanding and harsh because of the pressures of work. But please know that I do love you." The youth began sobbing and confessed, "Father, thank you. I was planning to commit suicide tomorrow because I thought you didn't care about me any more. Now I won't." You never know how much difference your appreciation will make.

To prepare yourself for this sadhana, stand before a mirror and look at your face, right into your eyes, and say aloud, as if talking to another person: "I am grateful to you and appreciate your being in my life." Then describe in many sentences, to yourself, all the good you have done during the past five years. You can read from your list of goodness that you made earlier. You will soon see the reflection in the mirror soften, begin to smile as it absorbs the happy feeling of your appreciation. Once this art is perfected between you and you, you can begin to appreciate others in the same way. Don't be shy. No one is shy when angry. Why be shy when we are happy and lovingly grateful?

There is a brave new world on the horizon for followers of dharma, one in which we are kindly to each other, trusting and

aware of one another's feelings, a world where we acknowledge our debt to others, express our thanksgiving, first in our silent heart and then outwardly. Gratitude is one of life's richest resources, containing the power to change people's lives. Its opposite is a disease that erodes all contentment and fills our life with emptiness and despair. Take heart. These sadhanas on gratitude and appreciation have worked wonders for many. Yes, each one of us can make a difference. The world is changing, and we can make it change for the better, or we can leave it in the hands of those who make changes for the badder. It's our choice.

I appreciate each of our readers of Hinduism Today. You are the men and women, boys and girls who are strengthening Hinduism in hundreds of remote communities, upholding the dharma, setting the record straight. It is you who are inspiring us to produce the magazine each month, giving us so many ideas and cheering us on. You are making a great difference by simply living and speaking on these high principles that are so important to us all and to the future of humanity.