

# Interfaith Thanksgiving: A Story of Gratitude and Self-Balancing Acts

By Mike Ghouse, Contributor

You can only feel the joy when you say a big or a small thank you to the ones who have helped you along the way, whether it is materially, spiritually or professionally.

Expression of gratitude is the ultimate balancing act in everyone's life. We know whom we receive the good from and offer our gratitude. The absence of a simple thank-you creates an imbalance in the relationship and spiritual energy, while a simple thank you restores it.

I am pleased to share my personal story and few small things you can do to regain your sense of composure and balance.

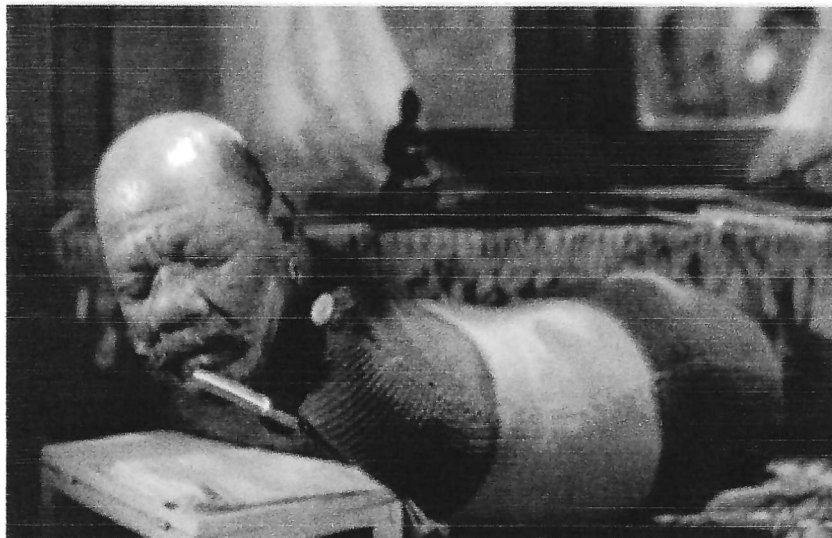
Firstly, we need to be considerate to those who did not have a good childhood, youth, adulthood or retirement. Let's be kind to those who are struggling to take care of themselves, and fighting for a square meal for their families. The least we can do for them is to let them know that we care.

Secondly, we need to awaken our mentor, be it Zarathustra, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus, Muhammad, Tao, Confucius, Nanak, Bahauallah, Gandhi, MLK or whomever we hold dearly. We need to emulate them for at least for the day as an experiment, ready to embrace every one with a caring attitude.

Finally, let's make a list of people who have helped us shape our lives. We should not lose enthusiasm due to a large number of people we have to thank, we can do it by carrying a piece of paper, and writing down the names as they pop in the mind, even if we don't call everyone on the list, we have already said our thanks by thinking about the individual and writing his or her name down. When we express our gratitude to the person who has made a difference in our life, it brings a ton of relief. It's ours to keep.

## The Unforgettable Story of Appaiah

It was a Sunday ritual for me to sit and take care of the poor. A line of the needy people would pass in front of my house, and being the oldest in the family, my father had assigned me the task of doling out the alms to the individuals when they pass by our door. I have seen lepers, people who cannot see, hear or talk, and people with missing body parts.



I was fascinated by one such person, he did not have arms and limbs from the base of the body, and he was just a torso with a head. He wrapped his body with a tube (those days car tires were inlaid with rubber tubes to hold the air) of a car tire, and would slide inch by inch on his back from door to door... his shoulder and rear part would move in tandem similar to a snake.

It was beyond me to understand Appaiah, I often wondered, what is there for him in life? The 14-year-old in me was full of ambition, and was

looking forward to getting my education, finding the work, getting married, having a house and kids. I was a typical teenager loaded with testosterones and could not imagine life beyond that.

Why does he not commit suicide? What is there for him to look forward to? One day, I asked him. "Appaiah, you don't have relatives, can't do thing, don't have a place to live, and can't wear clothes ... why do you want to live?" He turned around and took a deep breath and looked at me, he made an effort to move, but could not, and said, son, I look forward to every morning to see the blue sky or see the rain and smell the earth, I taste the good food people give me, I am thankful to God for giving me these eyes to see the beauty of his creation. I was watching him, he did not have the arms to point to his eyes, he then asked me, isn't there so much to be thankful for? Live for?

He was poetic, philosophical and pragmatic. He shattered my bias to smithereens, here I was thinking, what does this guy know?

I was rendered speechless. Here is a man with nothing to hope for, yet he is not complaining, instead, he is appreciating what he has got, which is nothing. That was quite an influencing experience in my life to treat others as I would want to be treated (Bible).

Just that morning, I heard my dad's favorite verse from Quran: "Then which of the favors of your Lord will ye deny?" (55:16). Now, when hopelessness hits me, I go to the Scriptures. I have found solace in opening Bhagavad Gita, Bible, Guru Granth Saheb, Dale Carnegie's book, Kitáb-i-Aqdas or simply read Sura Rahman, chapter 55 in Quran, to uplift my spirits. We have to be grateful for whatever we have and express it to the unknown giver, a true thanksgiving. You can only feel the joy when you say a big or a small thank you to the ones who have helped you along the way, whether it is materially, spiritually or professionally.

A simple thank you will do a lot of good to us, and our relationships. Most people say thanks without fail, those who miss out on a few things; we have an opportunity to reflect on this Thanksgiving Day.

If you don't believe in God, that is fine, it is still a release when you say thanks to the invisible good that came to you un-asked.

### **Life Is a Self-Balancing Act**

Life is self-balancing act; everything we do and say is spiritual as well as a real life transaction that moves the needle from balance to imbalance, and back to balance.

The mechanism is built around forgiveness, repentance, service and gratitude. These values are a product of co-existence and inculcated through religious teachings; however, the atheists would also achieve the same without invoking God.

The accountant chants, for every debit there is a credit; the physicist has proved that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and the doctor declares, that blood lost from the body of an individual must be replenished with an equal amount of blood to sustain life.

As a spiritualist I say, for every wrong we do, an equal amount of energy is drained from us, and for every good we do, energy is recouped. We are constantly receiving and giving energy, intake and output must be equal to have a healthy living, or else we are thrown off balance.

For every hurt we hurl on others, an equal amount of burden gets dumped on us, and until we say sorry and repent genuinely, the energy balance within us deteriorates. The transaction remains incomplete.

### **Where Is Happiness?**

If you are single or empty nesters and nowhere to go, call up Salvation Army, a hospital or a homeless shelter and volunteer your services. There is a joy in serving others.

As the Jewish Scriptures say, *Ve'ahavta la'ger* -- you must love the stranger for that guaranteed happiness. Jesus reached out to the ones who were abandoned by the society. Prophet Muhammad said the least you can give to others is hope and a smile. The Hindu Scriptures guides you to treat the whole world as one family. Buddha, the learned one, taught the joys of living for others. The Sikh faith is indeed founded on the principle of caring for the humanity. The Jains and Baha'i believe our joy comes from taking care of others. The Native Americans and Wicca believe we have to take care of what we see around us and preserve it for the next seven generations, life and the matter. With malice toward none is a good advice from Mahatma Lincoln to follow.

### **Happy Thanksgiving**

When you express your gratitude to the persons who have made a difference in your life, it brings a ton of relief to you. Make an effort and enjoy the peace of mind that comes with it. May you be blessed to be a blessing to others. Amen!

*(Mike Ghouse is committed to build a cohesive America and offers pluralistic solutions on issues of the day.)*