

PERSPECTIVE: The Lesson of Thank You
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My grandfather died a couple months ago, and I never told him thank you. Even after finding out he was terminally ill with cancer of the brain and lungs, I figured on plenty of time to wander over and express my appreciation for everything he'd done.

"He's a fighter," I thought. "He'll last a while."

I was wrong. After the radiation and chemotherapy weakened him, he caught pneumonia, and then he was gone.

I should have learned this lesson by now. Say thank you whenever and wherever possible. Say it loud and often. They are two very important words in any language. As a Buddhist, I should have known this. SGI President Ikeda exemplifies it wherever he goes.

Having had the fortune to work near him during his last three visits to South Florida, I witnessed time and again how he always made it a point to express his heartfelt appreciation to those around him. Consistently, I saw how this deeply and positively affected everyone he came in contact with.

Even after extremely long and arduous days, when anyone would be forgiven a little abruptness, he would still go out of his way to shake an outstretched hand, smile and say thank you. In any language. Being decidedly monolingual, as he puts it, this generous man can give thanks in many different languages. *Abrigado. Gracias. Arigato.*

Nichiren Daishonin greatly valued expressions of gratitude, also. The Goshō is filled with examples of the Daishonin giving thanks for everything from the smallest gift of rice to shelter and protection. He understood that even a few heartfelt words could encourage others tremendously and strengthen spirits for long journeys or hardships. When one's hard work and sincere action are noticed and met with acknowledgment and gratitude, one's life can be brightened tenfold. This brightening, in turn, can affect family, friends and so on in an ever-widening circle. As we develop ourselves through chanting Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō, we can likewise better our communities through expressions of gratitude.

I should have learned this lesson by now.

Not to say I haven't been trying. A few months before my grandfather died, I started keeping a gratitude journal, which is an idea I picked up from watching *Oprah* on a rainy day off. She had learned of this daily ritual from a book (I don't recall the title). Toward the end of each day, she sits with page and pen to reflect. She then writes at least five things she's thankful for from that day. Any five things will do, from the profound, like the awe felt when star-watching, to the seemingly unimportant, like a good sandwich. If she can't think of anything, she puts down "breathing."

Many people might think it a cliché to "count your blessings," but Ms. Winfrey claimed it has improved her life and helped her enjoy living in a profound way.

I gave it a try and soon realized she was correct. Keeping a gratitude journal gives fresh perspectives on seemingly bad days and opens my eyes to the constant creation of value and beauty around me. More important, it makes perfectly clear something we should already know as Buddhists: Giving thanks breeds things to be thankful for.

However, even with this knowledge fresh in my mind, I didn't take the time to express my appreciation to my grandfather. I know intellectually that through heartfelt daimoku I can still do so, but it seems incomplete.

So, Dean Jennings, wherever you are and whatever you're doing — thank you for building model railroads, thank you for teaching me how to fix a sliding glass door, and thank you for being my grandpa.

I hope you learn the lesson of thank you easier than I did.

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