

Br. Martin  
Giving Thanks For Life's Blessings  
Lake Shrine Temple  
November 27, 2011

As always we start with a period of meditation, which is the foundation of this spiritual path and the subject of everything we talk about including today, which is on Gratitude. Whenever Br. Martin thinks of gratitude, especially at this season of the year, he thinks of Sri Daya Mata and he spoke about how she feels so much joy during these times. "It's always the same," she said. "Around Thanksgiving Day, Divine Mother gives me such great joy that I can hardly contain it." She was very attuned to the idea of giving thanks.

Br. Martin went on to tell a story about something that happened to him that he'd not told before because at the time it happened he wasn't one of the service leaders so he never got credit for it. He said the story was somewhat applicable. The monks were playing basketball and one of them sprained his ankle so ice was needed. He ran into the monk's kitchen to call the main kitchen because the monks didn't have any. He misdialed and got the Director's kitchen instead of the main kitchen. A voice answered the phone and he'd just said that they needed ice right away and can you get it? The response was okay, okay, okay; we'll get the ice. It was Daya Ma who answered the phone and instead of saying that it was the wrong number she was obedient to the task at hand in the spirit of humility.

Humility and gratitude are really tied in together. Brother Bhaktananda often said that with these two things you can always be on the safe side...be grateful...be humble...because gratitude is inversely proportional to our expectations. The more expectations we have the more difficult it is to be grateful because the bar is just so high. We will never be satisfied. When you're humble you don't think you deserve that much, so it's easier to be happy, easier to be grateful.

Br. Martin clarified that by "deserve" he wasn't meaning he ego. Humility isn't feeling bad about the ego, it's feeling good about the soul. It's a positive thing. It has nothing to do with the lack of self-respect. It has incredible self-respect. And that humility comes only in meditation because you've got to know the soul. It is not about abnegation of the ego. The ego goes away once you learn...once you experience the soul there is just no comparison! He's just this little guy who thinks he does it and the soul goes "isn't he cute". That's how you feel.

In order to have gratitude meditation is the key thing...to cultivate that humility...to expect nothing because we have everything inside. Because no matter how much you have outwardly, you can never be grateful that you have everything...all your desires fulfilled...like if you had a genie and everything...then you wouldn't be miserable. It doesn't work that way because it's all relative and when you have that there's a completeness there. The more you get the more you want.

But when you get inner peace...joy...it's a different animal. It's absolute, not relative. When you have that there is completeness there...that you're satisfied with it. You don't want anymore.

Sometime you can sit in meditation and say that it's perfect...there is nothing that you're wanting for. That's what we get in meditation when we make the effort to practice these techniques...to withdraw the life force...to go within. It's not just like closing your eyes and imagining...it's a real science.

Paramahansaji said, "In America we commemorate the spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers, the originators of the great democratic civilization, by setting aside, just as they did, a Day of Thanksgiving to the Lord of the Universe. Our thanks are for our many blessings. And we offer up a special prayer into Spirit, that not only every American but each member of our world family shall strive, by manifesting Christlike virtues, to become a true citizen of the globe. As example talks louder than words let everyone become a true child of God thereby helping his other brothers in the world become like him."

This subject is after Thanksgiving, which Br. Martin said he thought odd. We don't hear the Christmas service after Christmas but it works for Thanksgiving because it's easy before the big meal to be grateful then comes Monday and back to work. Then how do we feel? That's the challenge.

Br. Martin said that when he thinks about gratitude it's disconnected between what we have to be grateful for. It really doesn't matter. A lot of the times we find that people who have the least to be grateful for are the most grateful.

It's a very interesting subject to look at. Why is this? The Dobbie story really brings this out because the pilgrims who thought of giving thanks...they were the ones who started it all. They had the toughest row to hoe because they had hardship after hardship...two months at sea, many were sick, a terrible winter, they couldn't grow crops, they didn't anticipate it, they couldn't move into log cabins, two or three were dying every day, they had to bury them in common graves because of the fear of an Indian attack, to top it off the story says they ran out of beer...and yet, they gave thanks! How can we do that?

It's very typical of today...it rings true because we think today's times are difficult. It's not the mass grave kind but seems more like the running out of beer kind difficulties sometimes. There are psychological problems and difficulties that we have that they didn't. It's very hard living in this age. In the '60's and '70's we were always saying times are hard, times are hard. Br. Martin said he'd say that they're really not, that it's always been like this. Now he said he thinks that times are hard. That we finally got there.

So that's a blessing! Now we can finally practice gratitude. It's easier to practice gratitude when times are hard. We think that if we won the lottery we'd be really grateful. But we wouldn't. We'd be too freaked out about it. Maybe one would. It's like the story of Christ healing the lepers. Only one comes back to thank him. It's not human nature.

The Bible passage talks about it: "And it came to pass that he (Jesus) went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, and there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices, and said, 'Jesus, Master, have

mercy on us!' And when he saw them, he said unto them: 'Go shew yourselves unto the priests.' And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at his feet, giving him thanks. And Jesus answering said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.'"

Paramahansaji comments: "In these words Jesus points out the material nature of the majority of people., who are often ungrateful even when they are most benefited. Imagine! Out of the ten lepers who had the good fortune to be instantaneously healed by the Divine Power, only one returned to thank God and Jesus."

This is human consciousness. Br. Martin said he had a real serious illness at one time and at that time he was just grateful to be alive...just grateful for the present...and that it was a great feeling in contrast to the seriousness of the illness. He said he could look at his watch though as to how long that feeling of gratitude lasted because as soon as the crisis passed it went away. He said that it was a loss because it was so joyous to be so grateful. He said he thought he needed to create a support group for people to get well because he lost that.

This is human consciousness because when there is a crisis it brings us to the present and that's where God is. Otherwise when we're in our normal state we're way out into the future with our plans and way back in the past with our regrets. There just no room in the mind for gratitude then...no room in the inn.

A famous photographer, Carson, was taking a picture of Neil Armstrong and Armstrong was asking him about the different places he'd traveled throughout the world. Armstrong said, "You've been all over the world." He was really fascinated. Then Carson said, "You've been to the moon." And Armstrong said, "Yeah, but that's the only place I've been." Human nature!

Although Br. Martin said he's trained himself out of it, he used to quite often focus in on someone who was distracted or wasn't paying attention or even hostile as he looked out over the audience when he was giving a talk. He'd think he'd have to convince them...he had to communicate with that person and come back to them again and again. He said he'd mentioned that to other speakers and they'd said they did the same thing.

It's called the "missing tile effect". Like if you have a missing tile in your room or if you've just painted your house and there's a little blemish, that's all you see. You don't see all the tiles that are there or the good paint job...just the problem. That's the mind! Because of evolution...because of survival...we only survive by focusing on the negative. We don't survive by being a positive thinker...the lions will get us!

But we don't live in that world anymore. It's been turned on its head. Now the lions are mental and spiritual. It's in the mind. Then positive thinking is what saves us rather than negative thinking. So we're fighting thousands and thousands of years of evolution and we're really working with the brain that's kind of dysfunctional. Bad thoughts are like Velcro and good thoughts are like Teflon...the bad thoughts

stick and the good thoughts just slide away! We don't even notice them.

It is said when happiness is discussed that the first key to happiness is gratitude! It's not really about giving thanks so much as about getting our minds off the 5% that's bad and the 95% that's good. It is said that it's not even a close second any other quality that promotes happiness. Gratitude is number one.

"To want good is to magnify it," Paramahansa said in a Thanksgiving letter. "For most people," Guruji said, "on Thanksgiving Day, although soiled with the blood of the unthankful turkeys, is a great day of awakening and of thinking of the most important and most often forgotten Molder of our Destiny."

Guruji had a great sense of humor. He added: "Thousands of people who eat turkey forget to thank God at all, thinking more of the savory bird than of Him. If you have turkey, be sure to 'stuff' it with your best Bliss-seasoned dressing of thankful remembrance of God: for all His highest gifts of wisdom, peace, and power to accomplish, as well as for His relatively inconsequential gift of the turkey dinner and so forth. Be sure to thank God for forgiving you for compelling the quickening of the turkey's evolution against its own will. And also thank God that you are not the turkey, to be sacrificed for the festivity of Thanksgiving. Don't feel uncomfortable because of my sympathy for the turkey; truly I am more sympathetic toward you, who are superior to the turkey, out of concern lest you bring great trials upon yourselves by forgetting God. He is waiting to hear your unceasing knock of devotion and to open the Gates of Omnipresence to receive you. Whether you eat turkey or not does not matter if you will only knock hard with devotion on the doors of your heart. He will open the Gates of Omnipresence to receive you."

So gratitude is not just that extra thing we can do to make things work out nicely. It's really survival. If we don't cultivate gratitude we get the reverse. The default option is suffering. It is something we really have to pay attention to.

Someone said that instead of complaining that we don't have everything we want we should be glad we don't have everything we deserve.

Gratitude is something that is required of us. It is not something extra! It's not required of us as a sense of duty or whatever, it's really the only response to life when we see it as it is instead of bringing all our worries and desires and human things that we add to it to self-create our own suffering.

Today there is all this political and social unrest...occupy Wall Street...and it's kind of interesting because what the people are protesting is the death of the middle class. We had this incredible, huge class of people who were really prosperous and doing well. That has really shrunk over the years until it's almost disappeared. So it's instructive to look and say how that middle class was created? The middle class was created out of an act of gratitude. It was in 1945 with the GI Bill that it started. It was out of gratitude for the soldiers who fought in WWII, they gave them a college education when they returned from the war. Those huge number of soldiers got degrees in technology, science, as well as many other

professions and created all the...microwaves, dishwashers, telephones...everything we have in our world right now.

They created this incredibly efficient organizational opportunity structure where we have all this leisure. Leisure is really an exceptional thing. Looking back in history people did not have leisure time. You were up in the fields from dawn to dusk earning a living.

We've had this remarkable utopian society for many years. Do you know what they called that generation from 1945? The Greatest Generation! Nobody disputes it. Imagine if they called us the greatest generation. Nobody would buy it at all.

But there was something they had. They had gratitude. They had an understanding of life. They had something...because it comes in cycles. That Greatest Generation in '45 followed the generation before them that was called The Lost Generation. They had lost it...the depression came, WWII came and all such things. The Greatest Generation learned from their mistakes. They got to get back to basics and then it went up. Their progeny...me...the Baby Boomers messed it up again because we started taking things for granted. Do we every think of where all the things that we use or do come from and are grateful for them? Instead we're thinking of what to buy that's 'more'. We're looking for the next generation rather than being grateful for the previous generation.

So the Boomer messed it up and now what's next? The Gen Nexus and the Millennial have got our mess and they're saddled with it now and they're not too real happy. They can't blame us. They need to realize what's going on and cultivate this ability to not take things for granted and then it will stop. Then it'll go into the next phase of the cycle and that would be good too because we're due for an upswing.

This is what Brother Premamoy was faced with when we entered the Ashram...all the Boomers from the '70's. He tried to get us out of the 'take it for granted' mentality. He was very strict and very watchful. He was incredibly strict. We'd never had anyone like that.

As with everything else it was a big adjustment when you came into the Postulant Ashram, especially with diet. If you were used to a little bit of sugar...forget it...very bland food...no sweets. Things like we'd never given a second thought to, like honey, started looking very attractive on the table...something sweet! We were pouring honey over everything like crazy. Brother Premamoy saw that and said, "Hey guys, watch it! Divine Mother will take that away." Sure enough shortly after that the bees in South America stopped making honey and the price went up and went out of our budget. We had no honey!

None of the scientists...nobody knew why the bees stopped making honey except us...to teach us a lesson. We look for signs and reasons for why such and such happens. Things happen in response to human karma. We do things...we mess it up...get the results...we learn and change the results. Divine Mother is only interested in our education.

"Whenever you take things for granted," Brother Premamoy told us, "Divine Mother sees to it that it

isn't granted anymore."

Renunciation means giving up the idea that you are entitled to things. It's a shift in attitude. Br. Martin was going to use the term subtle but sometimes they're not very subtle. He said he had the habit of opening the refrigerator and saying, "Do we have any food in here." Meaning things like pizza and ice cream and, of course, there was food in there but not any food that he wanted. On one occasion Brother Priyananda was standing to the side when Br. Martin repeated the phrase when he opened the fridge door. Brother responded by saying that there was a whole fridge full of food. He didn't get Br. Martin's humor at all and after thinking about it Br. Martin realized that Brother grew up in post-war Germany, in Berlin. There they literally had to scavenge for food and everything where on the other hand he grew up in Orange County just feeding himself. So for Brother Priyananda opening the fridge and not finding any food was a real possibility. Those casual utterances that we use that seem rather harmless are what Brother Premamoy was looking for. These casual utterances sometimes indicate deeper attitudes. They are not so subtle but they are really effective.

Right off the bat there was one of the two that Br. Martin had that came out. The second day after Br. Martin's arrival a car was pulling up to the Postulant Ashram because another postulant was also moving in. His luggage was being unloaded and Br. Martin went to help. He asked Brother Premamoy whether they needed any help and he said it was as if he spoke a foreign language. Brother Premamoy looked at him and said, "Yes, you can help! You can help us." In other words he meant that Br. Martin's help was not needed but that it was a privilege to help. That is, if you help us that's your blessings...that's us serving you.

It became a real different mindset to think of "how much am I doing for you"...it's really dangerous to think that way. Then we start measuring our service and thinking of how much we're getting back and eventually you just reason yourself out of helping anybody, because you're not going to get back what you put into it, only you give 100%. Back then, the whole thing was structured that you give 100% without getting anything back. It's pretty much like boot camp this spiritual training. Br. Martin chuckled as he said he found it very, very difficult to give but not to get back. It started with a change in attitude of those casual utterances that Brother was rooting out of us...you need any help...is there any food in here?

Br. Martin said he had a message on his answering machine yesterday asking if he'd talk about Spanky, his dead cat, this morning. Cats seem to bring out qualities that people seem to love to hear about. He went on to tell a Spanky story.

She was a lovely, little runt of the litter that someone had abandoned. She was on the grounds at Mother Center one Halloween and ran up to Uma Mata. Uma Ma picked it up and said, "Give it to Br. Martin." So it was divine lineage down to me to take care of this abandoned cat. Spanky should still really have been with her mother, she was so young. So as soon as she saw me she said, "mother." There was a bond that Br. Martin said he'd never had with another living thing that was so sweet. He was mother, father, everything...she followed him everywhere he went. He went on to say that like all

pets, she had spiritual lessons to teach.

It's hard to think of gratitude because cats aren't very grateful and Spanky wasn't grateful but that he was grateful for her. So it was a test for him. What he always liked about cats is that they're low maintenance. So when he traveled...go off on tours...all he had to do was spread out newspaper, get a bunch of bowls and fill them with dry cat food. There was no need to get another monk to look after her. Spanky would just eat what she wanted to, not like a dog that would overeat and die. It was so simple to take care of Spanky that way until she got sick about ten years. She had a severe illness and Br. Martin had to go to Europe so another monk pitched in to take care of her during that time.

When he came back the other monk wanted to continue taking care of Spanky. He was feeding her all these savory things and accusing me of not taking care of her by giving her dried cat food. Spanky also spotted connecting with Br. Martin. She'd bonded with the other monk...maybe it was because of the food or something might have happened with her head because she had cancer and seemed to have amnesia...it had nothing to do with the food! It broke Br. Martin's heart that Spanky had forgotten him for the other monk. In the end it was all for the good because that when he lost Spanky before she died a year later. The separation cushioned the blow. It was like it's too bad for the other guy when he lost the cat.

The lesson is that the vast panorama of experience...just like when Robinson Caruso was shipped wrecked on an island...the worst possible thing that could happen. He took out a piece of paper and made a list of everything that was good and everything that was bad...it was either good or bad. Br. Martin's favorite movie in the 60's was Swiss Family Robinson. He said it was the highest grossing movie for a long time...it did better than Exodus and Spartacus. It was the greatest movie for a ten or eleven year old kid because they built this seven-story tree house on the island that had all these gadgets and things. It was amazing and it was all made from things of the earth. That was all they needed! That is how we're really supposed to live. When we get something we just jury-rig it and we've got it. But we've got to plan things, stockpile and it makes us miserable.

After postulant training Br. Martin was living a rather cloistered life on Mt. Washington. He didn't have any real reason to go and liked staying on Mt. Washington so he didn't see the outside world much. Then out of the blue he was sent to Phoenix to give a service. While there he went to one of the large grocery stores and was overwhelmed. There were just too many choices of all the various products and he wondered how people decide which one to choose. He said it was incredible and that he also felt sad for Divine Mother...so many choices but do we think of her with gratitude for all the choices and we don't.

We pity the people who grew up in post-war Berlin because they must have had it tough. But in some ways they had it easier because they didn't have all these choices...at the grocery store, cell phone plans, which one to get...that doesn't add to our happiness. It has been found that the more choices people have the more unhappy they are, even if they've made the right choice because of always ruminating...well maybe I should have that other thing. The mind is off on these tangents and away from

these present moments of gratitude.

It's not our fault that we're ungrateful and we're not ungrateful now. It's just a very, very difficult time to practice gratitude with all the choices, with all the abundance and like he said previously, sometimes the people who have the least are the most grateful. It kind of lends itself to that. We have more of an uphill climb.

Guruji said that we are not born with contentment and satisfaction, that we create it. He said, "Contentment and satisfaction do not come with the possession of things. The possession of things, and their care, can become a real burden. On the other hand, the feeling of relief that comes with the realization that we are no longer responsible for material possessions can be very keen."

Br. Martin went on to mention that his mother recently passed at the age of 100 and that she played a real trick on him by making him her survivor trustee. He's finding it a real pain especially for someone who has never dealt with finances, mortgages, bank accounts, real estate and taxes. He now has a better understanding of how we all live since he's kept on hold for days and then doesn't get any information. He's also worried about it because he now has to take care of his brothers at this time. After finding himself too concerned he stepped back and realized he was the trustee not the owner of this stuff but just looking after it for his brothers or whoever and the need to back off.

Br. Martin said that he then realized that that's how it is with our own lives. We're just trustees of our lives...just looking after our lives. Then stated that was obviously why Divine Mother puts an end to it but most of us still don't get it. We still think we're going to go on forever... what's going to happen to the house and whatever but no, we're just looking after it. We do a good job because it's our duty...it's the right thing to do...but whatever happens it's not ours.

Paramahansaji once said, "Feel that you are just favoring the body by staying here." It's not ours. We're just along for the ride. "The devotee should think of the body as being given into his charge. He takes proper care of it just to please God. He should harbor beautiful thoughts because the mind is a temple of the Lord. The devotee is merely a custodian of that mental temple."

Isn't that a neat way for us to think about our thoughts and moods? When thoughts like I'm a loser come in just think of the mind of how funny it is and that it's not working right. Just because we've thought it doesn't mean that the information is correct or a part of us. It's just the stupid mind! But we do need to take care of it by giving it the right food...fish oil capsules or whatever. Don't take the mind seriously. Don't take on its moods because you're just the trustee. Then it's fun! Then you enjoy the good stuff and forget about the bad.

Guruji goes on to say: "The devotee is the custodian of that mental temple and he should look after his soul and contact it by meditation because the soul is the image of the Heavenly Father. So do not spend your time on useless things. You are all too hurried in modern life worrying yourself by rushing about to make money for leisure which you usually do not enjoy when you have it."



So we had the Baby Boomers, the next generation, the Millennials and there's another generation that's popped up now. Generation I or Generation C, which is the Internet generation. This is huge...kind of pivotal...because the Internet has really changed everything. The technology is incredible!

Br. Martin told the following story. There was this young lady in a social studies class that was given a project. For a week she and her family could only use things that were invented before the early '90's. They couldn't do anything...no cell phone, no Internet...it was like the Stone Age. There lives basically ground to a halt and her mother was in a mood because she couldn't have her Botox®.

It was another world and the question comes up because of the connection with simplicity and gratitude...what about technology? Is it good or bad? Is it helpful or an obstacle to the spiritual life? It is really relevant now. Many articles talk about that now, like education. How to teach kids now? How to avoid ADD?

It wasn't until Br. Martin was transferred to the Lake Shrine about a year ago that he got his first cell phone. He said during that time he's probably sent about six text messages and that it takes him about twenty minutes to send one text. He finds it kind of "cool" though.

While he was preparing for this service on thanksgiving his phone beeped and it was a very nice, long Thanksgiving card from a fellow monk at the Lake thanking him for his friendship and such. Br. Martin said that his response was U2...as few keystrokes as possible and went back to the service preparation. He went on to say that he thought this was so efficient, so cool and that he'd do his Christmas cards that way! So the Internet, the cell phones are tools as long as they're not using us.

Again, keeping a watchful eye up that we are taking things for granted...thinking we deserve and need to have this or whatever. Paramahansaji years ago instituted the practice gratitude through economy in the Ashram. The lights would be turned off whenever one left the room. Pieces of paper were reused. Really minute kinds of things. However, now like that old saying: "Pennywise and pound foolish" these kinds of things are just the opposite of economy now. They take more of our time but they're done anyway because of the principle. Otherwise it would be easy to start taking things for granted, it would be easy to start sliding down that slippery slope of not being aware of what is being received but more importantly where it's coming from...that is, the source of that prosperity.

A devotee was telling Br. Martin that she wanted a husband and a better life. She was a musician and she practiced this Horn of Plenty Bank...where she'd put a coin in and say the prayer. After doing this everything worked out great. She got a great husband...a great life and whatever. In gratitude for this law that worked, she kept on practicing it. Before her husband would wake up, she'd make him breakfast and then send him off to work. She'd be at the door and always recited the prayer as he was walking to the car to go to work every morning. One day when he woke up the husband was feeling kind of sick, it was a rainy day and as usual the wife was by the door as he was walking to the car saying the prosperity prayer. He turned around and said, "How come you're saying the prayer but I have to do the

work?" She replied, "That's what happens when you say the prayer, you don't have to do the work." But, of course, she was doing the work, that of cultivating the ideal of abundance.

Gratitude is not a path waiting for circumstances to harmonize with our desires but a positive active devotion. If we do not acknowledge Him, we do not behold Him.

That doesn't mean that it's magic or a miracle. We can do the Horn of Plenty Bank and things can get worse. Look at the Book of Job. God is not at our beck and call. That's not the point of it because when you do the Horn of Plenty Bank you're not necessarily going to win the lottery or that things are going to turn around but you will be in tune with God. You will understand your purpose in life and that's a big thing.

Br. Martin said that since he's been at the Lake and people come off the street, he's astounded at how many people have asked him what the purpose in life is. Some are in tears and he could see that there's great suffering there of not knowing why. A man with a wife can bear almost anything. If you have a framework for living, it doesn't matter for you can go through anything. You have something to go for. Like when swimming to Catalina the seaweed or driftwood, it doesn't bother you because you're just pushing it away with your strokes...you're going for something. Sometimes we even take this for granted even when we understand why we're here and what we have to do. We may not be doing it as much as we'd like to and we probably aren't but it's real struggle and we are so blessed to have that struggle. Most people don't.

Daya Ma once said, "All of you came here because God drew you. It wasn't through your own will though it might seem that way. God thought of you and called you here so don't waste your time. "

Even the Guru, Paramahansa Yogananda, said, "Without the understanding and the experience I received from the teachings of India, I would have been the most miserable person in the world." An avatar said that. So we can't look for more of a reason than that to be grateful.

Guruji said, "For your many blessings, be thankful every day, and not only when the calendar indicates Thanksgiving-time. Material prosperity should not be the basis of your gratitude. Whether your worldly possessions be many or few, you are still rich in the gift from God. Love Him, not for the outward things He may give you but for His gifts to you of Himself as your Father. When you deserve it He will add material abundance to His other gifts to you."