

## Why Should We Be Grateful?

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Good morning teacher! Good morning everyone! I am glad that we have the chance each week to gather here to share and learn Buddha Dharma. Today is Thanksgiving Day, one of the most important holidays in America. Thanksgiving Day began as a day of giving thanks for the blessing of the harvest and of the preceding year. It's celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November. It's also celebrated in Canada on the second Monday of October. Traditionally, Thanksgiving Day is a time for family and friends to get together to enjoy a special meal. The meal normally includes a turkey, stuffing, potato, gravy, pumpkin pie and some vegetables. But most importantly, Thanksgiving Day is a time for people to give thanks for what they have.

The first question would be who do we need to give thanks to?

In US, there is a saying, "It takes a village to raise one child." It means that it takes a whole community to educate a child so that he/she can live well in this world.

In Buddhism, after we recite sutras or mantras or do a good deed, we will transfer the merits and virtues by reciting the verse of transference. The verse of transference states:

May the merit and virtue accrued in this work

Adorn the Buddha's pure land

Repaying the four kinds of kindness above

And aiding those suffering in the paths below

May those who see and hear this  
All bring forth the resolve for Bodhi  
And when this retribution body is over  
Be born together in the Ultimate Bliss

According to the Contemplating the Heart Sutra, in this verse, the four kinds of kindness above means the kindness of parents, the kindness of sentient beings, the kindness of the king/president and the kindness of the triad of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

The second question would be why do we need to give thanks to the parents, the sentient beings, the king/president and the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?

First, we all should be very grateful to our parents for they brought us to this world and raised us up. I cannot say to the end of the great kindness of the father and the mother. The mother is always mindful of the child since it's just an embryo in the belly. During the ten months of pregnancy, the inconvenience, difficulties and troubles that the mother went through are hard to describe. She gives up her own favor of food, clothes, and so on, and she is worried so much that she cannot rest well. The sufferings get heavier when the delivering day gets closer. Delivering a baby is just like being cut by hundreds of knives. The baby's first cry sounds like music that comforts the still suffering mother. The kindness of the mother to raise up the baby is wider than the sky. The kindness of the mother is greater than the Sumeru Mountain. Shouldn't we be grateful to our parents and repay their kindness?

Now let's talk about the kindness of sentient beings. As stated in the sutras, from the beginningless time ago, all the sentient beings have been cycling in the six realms. All sentient beings have been fathers and mothers to each other in many lives. Because of this, all men are our kind fathers and all women are our kind mothers. They are equal to our parents in this life. Due to our ignorance, our wisdom has been covered. And so, we don't know the truth behind. Our previous debts have not paid back yet, for this reason, we should be grateful to all sentient beings pay their kindness as most as we can.

As stated in the Contemplating the Heart Sutra, the third kindness that we should be grateful of is the kindness of the King/President. To be the king/president, he has to possess numerous merits and virtues and his merits and virtues should be more than any beings in the country. And so, his great merits and virtues can comfort all beings and bring bliss to all beings. Just as all the palaces in the world, their posts are the fundamental parts. For all the people in the country, their king/president is the one they depend upon. A king of sage can manage his people with the proper dharma. He is the sun to his people. If the king manages the country without proper dharma, his people will have nobody to depend on. And the country will get into trouble. And terrible things will happen in the country, such as intrusion by other country, inner war, natural disasters. If the people's king benefits his people with proper dharma, his merits and virtues will keep the country in peace. So, as a king of sage, he is/should be compassionate to his people, treat his people as his children and protect them days and nights. As a king of sage, he instructs his people to cultivate the ten kinds of goodness. As a result, his merits and virtues will increase accordingly too. We should be grateful to the king of sage and be grateful to his merits and virtues and be grateful that his country is safe and the people are living happy life.

The last but not the least kindness that we should be thankful of is the kindness of the triad of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

We are all Buddhists and we know that all sentient beings in the six realms are in the cycle of birth and death. Life is birth, then aging, sickness and death follow. The sentient beings in this world are full of greed, anger, ignorance, pride and suspicion, which are the five kinds of defilements of their mind. And due to the defilements, the sentient beings are full of afflictions and go through a lot of sufferings, drifting in the karmic sea.

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have come to this world solely for the purpose of teaching and transforming living beings. They use the 84,000 Dharma-doors to gather in beings with whom they have affinities. Failing to understand the spirit of kindness, compassion, joy, and giving of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we turn our backs on enlightenment and wallow in the dust of ignorance. We chase after petty things, forgetting the important things, and don't want to end birth and death or escape the Three Realms.

Everyone knows that the Three Realms are like a burning house; there is no peace within them. Yet we linger in the burning house, not at all scared, and not wishing to leave it, even though we know that it contains nothing but suffering.

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas explain the Dharma in an effort to teach us, but, unfortunately, we do not understand their intentions. We listen without hearing, and look without seeing; their instructions go in one ear and out the other. We prefer to go on

living in a stupor and dreaming our lives away, just like walking corpses. Though we may say we are cultivating, we are not seeking the path of true enlightenment.

These poor living beings bash their heads until blood streams down their faces. Yet they still do not know that they need to reflect within. No matter how devotedly the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas work to teach us, setting before us the Tripitaka (“Three Stores”) and the Twelve Divisions of the Buddha-dharma, we simply pay no attention. They have bestowed these innumerable Dharma treasures upon us, yet we feel no sense of gratitude; thus the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas feel very tired. Why? Living beings are truly difficult to liberate! The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas exhaust their efforts to save us, yet we remain unmoved; we still go about doing our own things, not cultivating, not upholding precepts. Nevertheless, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not discouraged. No matter how difficult it is to liberate living beings, they still want to do it. They want to compassionately liberate all living beings. How can we repay their kindness? For instance, consider the vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, who said,

As long as the hell is not empty,

I will not become a Buddha.

Only when all living beings are liberated

Will I become a Buddha.

Everyone should deeply ponder the meaning of these words. Consider how magnificent and great these vows are! Without even reading the Sutra, just by listening to this vow, we should feel deeply indebted to Earth Store Bodhisattva and to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for their compassionate and mindful protection of us.

From beginningless time, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have been giving up their very bodies and lives in order to nurture us. And so we must bring forth the resolve for Bodhi in order to repay their kindness, as well as the kindness of our parents and teachers and that of heaven and earth. We should seek Buddhahood and vow to liberate all living beings. We should be the Buddhas' compassionate representatives in proclaiming the Dharma and transforming beings, serving society and the country with a sense of righteousness. Let us always be compassionate and righteous, propagating the Buddhadharma and carrying out the Buddha's original intent with our humble effort.

Why is it that after the enlightenment, Buddhas have become Buddhas, they still do not forget living beings and they vow to liberate us? It's not only because all living beings have the Buddha-nature and can become Buddhas, but also an attitude of appreciation, to be grateful to all sentient beings. However, living beings do not realize this. Covered up by greed, hatred, stupidity, ignorance, afflictions, and idle thinking, their true wisdom cannot manifest. Therefore, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to show us the way to become enlightened. If we can cultivate accordingly, we will surely attain wisdom. We should remember and be grateful to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as our parents and teachers. We should not waste our precious lives. We should clearly recognize the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' intent and the power of their vows, so that we don't live our human lives in vain. And this is my answer to the 'why do we need to be grateful'. Thank you for your listening.