

Gratitude, Expands Who We Are

A message from Dr. Lata Sonpal



The holiday season has started with Jewish (Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur) and Hindu (Navaratri, Diwali) holidays in September and October.

Both Jewish and Hindu

calendars are Lunar based so they are not on the same date every year on the Western Calendar. Thanksgiving is around the corner and we generally celebrate it with family and friends.

Thanksgiving began with Pilgrims, upon arriving in America, learning survival from a gentleman named Squanto who taught them how to grow corn and other food. It is also said that people's praying and fasting during a drought brought blessing in the form of rain ending the drought allowing the corn to grow leading to harvesting. In many countries there are thanksgiving celebrations at harvest time.

In America Thanksgiving Day was celebrated in different contexts under different Presidents on different dates. Finally, in 1941 President Roosevelt signed a bill declaring the 4th Thursday of November, Thanksgiving Day, as a National Holiday.

Of course, we do not have to wait until the Thanksgiving Day to feel and express our gratefulness. We can do that on a daily basis, silently in our heart or express it to someone (verbally or in writing) who would also benefit from receiving our gratitude. Philosopher David Hume in 1739 wrote that "Of all crimes that Human creatures are capable of committing, the most unnatural is ingratitude."

I suggest to my patients, especially when they've had a conflictual relationship with their parents, to thank them for the gift of their life, for giving them opportunities to learn their lessons, through the ways the parents have been and through the

that they forgive their parents. Like Jesus Christ said, "Father, forgive them as they know not what they do."

Then I encourage them to send their parents light and love so the parents would be guided on the right path for greater good of all concerned and not harm anyone wittingly or unwittingly. I guide them to wish their parents peace and harmony, health and happiness and love and joy. I also suggest that they surround themselves with light and love so they will also be guided on the right path for greater good of all concerned and not repeat their parents' mistakes and open up to embracing peace and harmony, health and happiness and love and joy in their own life.

There is evidence, through various research studies that gratefulness and gratitude is beneficial to both the person expressing and the person receiving. Gratitude leads to more relationships and friendships (2014, *Emotion*), improves physical health, increases happiness and reduces depression (2012, *Robert Emmons, Personality and Individual Differences*), reduces aggression/retaliation (2012, *University of Kentucky*), improves sleep (2011, *Applied Psychology: Health and Wellbeing*), improves self-esteem and appreciation of others' achievements (2014, *Journal of Sports Psychology*).

Another finding is that the grateful people help not only those who helped them they also help strangers. Per His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama "In order to be happy we must first possess inner contentment, and inner contentment does not come from having all we want but rather from wanting and appreciating being grateful for all we have". He has also advised that "When we develop a right attitude of compassion and gratitude, we take giant steps toward solving our personal and international problems".

(Shapiro, Schwartz, and Sautter, 2002), progressive muscle relaxation (Khasky and Smith, 1999), and practice forgiveness (Witvliet, Ludwig, and Bauer, 2002). Some other ways to enhance attitude of gratitude is journaling, thank you letters or notes, counting blessings, focusing on positives, engaging in prayers of gratitude, etc. (Sansone, Sansone, and Emmons, 2016).

One of the most inspiring prayers is by Saint Francis of Assisi called "Lord, Let me be an instrument of thy peace" in which he asks "Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy; O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life".

Practicing gratefulness, as a part of our mindful living, enhances our physical, emotional, psychological, personal, social (including career), and spiritual wellbeing. Our daily Mantra could be: to navigate with tolerance our differences (in appearance, in thinking, in religious beliefs, in socio-cultural practices), reminding ourselves that our five fingers are of different sizes and shapes and yet all are needed for our hands to hold something precious like a child or prayer beads. Living in harmony, accepting others with kindness, generosity and gratitude will vitalize and invigorate us to aspire towards Spiritual Kinship.

Dr. Lata Sonpal has been a licensed psychologist for more than 33 years. She's worked for Dr. Brian Weiss at the Weiss Institute from 1995-2002. Since then she's run her own private practice. She specializes in Hypnotherapy and Past life regression and Future life Progression. She is open and eclectic in her approach and tailors therapy to the client's goals and needs combining methods such as Client Centered Humanistic Rogerian therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Mindfulness based), Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Reality Therapy, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, Holistic Therapy addressing Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual Issues. Dr. Sonpal, Marcus Centre, 9990 S.W. 77 Avenue, Suite #218, Miami.