

Gratitude: the Divine Storm

by Nicole Grace



In the dry mountain air of New Mexico, a fruit tree stirs expectantly as clouds gather above. The craggy sage shivers and the shining pines wave as the wind whispers the promise of a late morning rain. Sparrows, jays, and ravens trill their hymns and caw their prayers while the coyotes howl in harmony. Nature, the great Guru, spreads her plumage and prepares us all for another wise teaching.

The gray heavens will rumble a while longer, and then they will release their treasure. The trees, plants, and grass, the birds and beasts, will receive this blessing with simple humility. The earth offers to them what they need, and in turn, they will offer back their lives to the earth. There is no more powerful, no more holy spiritual quality, than humility. Without humility, all conscious evolution will cease.

If we come to believe that we have achieved an all-encompassing Mastery of Life, that there is no further way to rise, to better ourselves, our hearts, our lives, then we have closed our minds to any possibility of greater learning.

If we come to feel that we have achieved an enlightenment so advanced that there is nothing further to learn or to receive, we enter a dangerous, and ultimately sad, mind state. From such a confused perspective, we can come to believe that since no one and no thing can give anything or do anything for our benefit, it must follow that we are the ones who give everything to everyone else. What an exhausting concept; to be the lone Giver. Nature is wiser than this. Nature shows us that life first receives, and then offers fruit from what has already been given.

True enlightenment, true mastery, can only come from utter surrender. And in surrendering, each moment of each day, we are in a constant state of receiving. It is in the humble act of receiving love, light and life that we have the privilege of giving. What can we really give to Eternity but the fullness of our own surrender, the entire capacity of our heart's love? In surrendering to the Divine we become Divinity ourselves, and at last realize that we are Recipients rather than Givers. We realize that individuals have nothing to give Eternity, but

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everything to receive. For receiving our Life, we can only be grateful.

To be grateful for the immense gifts showered upon us by the Divine humbles us. To be grateful for our unique experience of Life—whether pleasurable or painful—humbles us.

Gratitude and Humility are woven together, like red and gold threads twined into a bright rope, the lasso that will grab us and lead us into everlasting peace.

Humility is indeed the most precious spiritual quality, and yet, it can often be the most challenging to embody.

First, it is important to understand exactly what humility is and what it is not. Humility is not an obsequious lowering of oneself with empty words in an attempt to appear not to care or be invested in one's own importance.

Humility is also not believing oneself to be the lowliest person on earth. In fact, this is just another form of ego—not much different spiritually from believing yourself to be the highest being on earth.

What is humility then? Humility is seeing yourself exactly as you are—no better and no worse. This requires clarity, discrimination, and courage.

If you recognize that you still have some work ahead of you towards achieving true humility (and it would be very humble of you to recognize that!) then the question arises: How can I become more humble?

Humility can be discovered and attained through the practice of embracing Gratitude. Gratitude is the gateway to humility and enlightenment. It is the ship you sail on across the threshold, from suffering into peace.

When we experience challenging circumstances, or enter a “dark night of the soul,” it can seem that we have nothing to be grateful for. God has taken everything and/or everyone we love or need away from us. But if you have clarity, discrimination, and courage, you can allow yourself to recognize many, many reasons to be grateful, despite your challenges.

A famous Sufi proverb says, “I cried because I had no shoes...until I met a man who had no feet.”

It can be very helpful, and also quite illuminating, to set aside a few quiet moments to make a list of everything in your life for which you are grateful. The list may start out brief, but after just a few moments of sincere contemplation about your life, you will likely find the list growing longer and longer and longer.

Highlight the “meta” categories for which you are most grateful, such as: your Life itself, your interest in self-discovery and spiritual evolution, having food and shelter, being loved by the Eternal, seeing sunsets, and so on.

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During different phases of our lives, we may be more grateful for certain things at certain times, but there are also always some things that may never change and for which we will be grateful until we draw our last breath. It is a wonderful, rewarding and non-denominational practice to take time every day to contemplate the treasures Eternity has lain at your feet. The Divine has bowed and offered to you Your Life itself, as a Buddhist might offer a khata (ceremonial scarf) to his guru.

This gift of life, this opportunity to learn more each day, to give more to others each day, to be better, kinder, and wiser, to laugh and breathe and love regardless of what we may receive—this gift is precious beyond imagining. This gift alone can open our hearts and welcome gratitude inside.

Watching nature, we can begin to understand.

A darkening sky knits its brows, flashing light and grumbling, while leaves lift and fly across its face. A peach tree flutters in anticipation. When the rain comes, she bows for the benediction. In the Spring, her gratitude will flush across her cheeks as pink fruit. The fruit will fall and feed birds and furred creatures and insects, it will ripen and rot back into the grateful soil. The tree's expression of gratitude itself becomes an offering back to the Divine.

What is the seed from which this beauty blooms?

What is the origin of gratitude, followed down its green stem to the root?

Of course, what else could it possibly be but love?

Gratitude is love. In true love—profound love—divine love, there is no one superior to another. Loved and lover are equals, offering themselves to each other gratefully, until there is no one offering and no one receiving, but just One undulating, loving storm, thundering in its own ears, for ever and ever.

Nicole Grace is a Buddhist monk, mystic and teacher, and the award-winning author of *Bodhisattva: How To Be Free, Teachings To Guide You Home* (Mani Press 2010). Join us in Denver, CO and Sedona, AZ this month to meet the author and get a signed copy of *Bodhisattva*. For more information, visit www.bodhisattvabook.com or facebook.com/bodhisattvabook.

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