

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
Arlington Street Church
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Give. Thanks.

What is the spiritual path of gratitude?

At the close of 2007, John Kralik's life was at an all-time low. He was struggling through a painful, second divorce; he had grown distant from his two older children, and feared he might lose contact with his young daughter; his girlfriend had just ended their relationship. He was forty pounds overweight; his tiny, depressing apartment, broiling in the summer, was now freezing; his small law firm was failing, and, with it, his dream of being a judge was slipping away.

"Feeling anything but thankful," John Kralik writes, "on New Year's Day ... I went for a hike, [and] I heard a voice. It said I shouldn't focus on what I wanted or [what I] had lost, but should be grateful for what I had." "[He] was struck by the belief that his life might become at least tolerable if, instead of focusing on what he didn't have, he could find some way to be grateful for what he had." With that, he says, 'the idea of a year of thank yous popped into my head.'

"[He] set ... a goal ... of writing 365 thank you notes in the coming year. One by one, day after day," he hand-wrote thank yous: for gifts of kindnesses ... for loved ones and coworkers, ... business associates, ... college friends, ... doctors, ... store clerks, ... and neighbors; ... anyone – really absolutely anyone – who'd done him a good turn, ... large or small.

"Immediately after he'd sent his very first notes, surprising and significant benefits began to come his way. John Kralik writes, 'I saw how much I had been blessed by so many people in different ways, and acknowledging their blessings seemed to make them multiply.'

"... While [he] wrote his notes, the economy collapsed, [and] the bank across from his office failed, but thank you note by thank you note, ... [his]

whole life turned around.... [to] financial gain ... true friendship, weight loss ... [and] inner peace. He says, ‘I was trying to tell people how much their kindness meant to me, [but] ... the project transformed my life... I’m now in great shape [– I’ve run three marathons]; ... I found a small but lovely house; and I was appointed to my dream job: Superior Court judge. Having written my 860th note, I can say I keep learning that gratitude is a path to the peace we all seek....’¹

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What is the spiritual path of gratitude? Give thanks.

Let’s break that down: Give. Thanks.

Sōen Nakagawa Roshi² gave a now-famous two-word answer to the student who said, “I am very discouraged. What should I do?”

“I am very discouraged. What should I do?”

The Zen Master replied, “Encourage others.”

Whether or not we are feeling encouraged is beside the point. Whether or not we are feeling grateful is beside the point. Spiritual teacher Dhyani Ywahoo says, “When we are feeling the poorest, that’s time to give a gift.”

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I hope you had the pleasure of this story that emerged from last month’s news of the international women’s soccer teams making their way to Kansas to play the qualifying matches for the World Cup.

On October 10th, Randy Waldrum, Trinidad and Tobago’s volunteer coach, tweeted, “I need HELP! T&T sent a team here last night with \$500 total. No equipment, ... no transportation, ... nothing.” His players had gotten breakfast at their hotel in Dallas, where they were training, but he didn’t know where lunch was going to come from. Later, he said, “I thought,

¹ Thanks to Arlington Street’s Ava Galante, who wrote me a very dear note of thanks, and enclosed the article about the book that had inspired her: John Kralik’s *365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*.

All quotations are from John Kraklik, *Up Your Gratitude*, 1/1/12, p. 12 and the Hyperion (publisher’s) précis of *365 Thank Yous*.

Please see amazon.com/gp/product/B004G B15W6?btkr=1

² Sōen Nakagawa was a Taiwanese-born Japanese Rinzai Zen Master (1907-1984). This anecdote is included in Michael Wenger, *49 Fingers: A Collection of Modern American Koans*, p. 120

[I have] an hour to find meals to get us through the day, let alone the next five or six days,” he said. “The only way I knew to do it was to send [out] the tweet...”

At its training camp in South Bend, Indiana, the team from Haiti received the plea. “The team had been running on donations and money from tee-shirt sales and other fundraising.” They had a total of \$1,316 in their account; they were hardly flush. But without hesitation, the young women from Haiti decided to give it all to their rivals from Trinidad and Tobago. Haiti’s volunteer coach, Shek Borkowski said, “My players saw on social media the difficulties faced by the T&T players, and approached me about what [we can] we do to help. I was stunned. They were very animated about helping, so I will do as they asked.”

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I wept. How great is that? Haiti, the twentieth poorest country in the world, giving it all to Trinidad and Tobago, the one hundred and thirty eighth poorest country in the world.... And similar to John Kralik’s story, as the story hit the news, the Clinton Foundation intervened, saying they wanted a list of the Haiti team’s immediate needs and its long-term budget, announcing that, going forward, they were officially funding women’s soccer in Haiti.³ I say, they wanted in – not necessarily to soccer, but to the spirit of that team.

What is the spiritual path of gratitude? Give.

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You may know Kevin Kling for his hilarious NPR commentaries in a quintessential Minnesota accent. Kevin Kling has a unique view of what’s funny; he was born with a left arm that’s much shorter than his right arm, and disabled. And then, “in his early 40s, a motorcycle accident nearly killed him.... [His right arm was paralyzed].”

While recovering from the motorcycle accident, he says, “... I had to take an elevator down to the bottom floor every day and try to walk half a block. That was, like, my job. And [one day,] I’d walked my half a block, and my wife, Mary, met me in the lobby, and she bought an apple for me.... [Food] had no taste. So I was losing a lot of weight. And she said, ‘Just take a bite, just for me.’”

³ Please see nytimes.com/2014/10/11/sports/soccer/haiti-pledges-money-to-trinidad-and-tobago-womens-soccer-team.html?_r=0

“So I took a bite,” says Kevin Kling, “and flavor: that was the day, [the moment] it came back.

“And the sweetness came in, and when the sweetness hit my tongue, I started to cry... I hadn’t cried in years. And my eyes were burning, and with my burning eyes and the sweetness in my mouth, it just felt good to be alive. And I just remember thinking, ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you that I lived.’ And ... my prayers shifted to thanks. And then I couldn’t tell whether, after that, good things were happening because I was saying thanks, or ... I was just noticing them.... [There] are blessings in my curses, even today. I mean, every day.”⁴

What is the spiritual path of gratitude?

Give thanks.

Give.

Thanks.

Ram Dass’ teacher, Maharaj-ji⁵ said,

“Love everyone, serve everyone; All is One.”⁶

When we remember that All is One, we will remember that there is no giver and no receiver, for each is the giver, and each the receiver.

Claude Monet, a founder of French impressionist painting, was going blind in the last 19 years of his life. During that time, he painted the water lily murals.⁷ Here is Lisel Mueller’s poem,

Monet Refuses the Operation

Doctor, you say there are no haloes
around the streetlights in Paris
and what I see is an aberration

⁴ Krista Tippett, host, interviewing Kevin Kling. Please see *On Being*, “Kevin Kling – the Losses and Laughter we Grow Into,” 3/7/13, at onbeing.org/program/the-losses-and-laughter-we-grow-into/transcript/5062#main_content

⁵ North Indian teacher, Neem Karoli Baba, known by his students as Maharaj-ji

⁶ *Sub Ek*, translated as “All is One”

⁷ Claude Monet (1840-1926) began to go blind in 1907. He painted the water lily murals (Les Nymphéas) – approximately 250 oil paintings – for Paris’ Musée de l’Orangerie in the final 10 years of his life.

caused by old age, an affliction.
 I tell you it has taken me all my life
 to arrive at the vision of gas lamps as angels,
 to soften and blur and finally banish
 the edges you regret I don't see,
 to learn that the line I called the horizon
 does not exist and sky and water,
 so long apart, are the same state of being.
 Fifty-four years before I could see
 Rouen cathedral is built
 of parallel shafts of sun,
 and now you want to restore
 my youthful errors: fixed
 notions of top and bottom,
 the illusion of three-dimensional space,
 wisteria separate
 from the bridge it covers.
 What can I say to convince you
 The Houses of Parliament dissolve
 night after night to become
 the fluid dream of the Thames?
 I will not return to a universe
 of objects that don't know each other,
 as if islands were not the lost children
 of one great continent. The world
 is flux, and light becomes what it touches,
 becomes water, lilies on water,
 above and below water,
 becomes lilac and mauve and yellow
 and white and cerulean lamps,
 small fists passing sunlight
 so quickly to one another
 that it would take long, streaming hair
 inside my brush to catch it.
 To paint the speed of light!
 Our weighted shapes, these verticals,
 burn to mix with air
 and change our bones, skin, clothes
 to gases. Doctor,
 if only you could see

how heaven pulls earth into its arms
and how infinitely the heart expands
to claim this world, blue vapor without end.⁸

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Beloved spiritual companions,

What is the spiritual path of gratitude?

May our hearts expand to claim this world:

All is One.

Give.

Thanks.

Let us give thanks.

Amen.

⁸ Lisel Mueller, "Monet Refuses the Operation," from *Second Language*