



A Sufi Message

The Art of Giving Thanks and Thanksgiving

Inspired by the Teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan

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*In prayer the repetition of thanksgiving brings to our soul our own voice,
and that voice echoes before the God who is within.*

– From The Nirtan by Hazrat Inayat Khan –

The Holy Qur'an says that among rows upon rows of birds, each one knows its own mode of praise. Each bird that sings shows the diversity of gratitude, and every single atom of the universe, in its own way is saying Alhamdulillah, "All Glory and Praise are due to God."

Like each bird singing its own "praise song" becomes a 'praiser', we too become a 'praiser' as our voice rises in Alhamdulillah. And when we recite our "praise song" together we become a harmonious symphony of praise for every detail of life that deserves our love and praise.

In the Holy Quran, Chapter 24 titled An-Nur, Verse 41 we read: *Do you not see that all that is in the heavens and the earth, even the birds that go about spreading their wings in flight, extol God's glory? Each knows the way of its prayer and of its extolling God's glory. God is well aware of whatever they do.*

PRACTICE: This "song of praise" is *Alhamdulillah* (sometimes pronounced hamdulillah or hamdullah) is a powerful Arabic phrase which translates to mean, "All praise is due to Allah", "Glory be to God."

Hazrat Inayat Khan begins on the subject of praise and prayer, "*The question now arises how to attain to this prayerful attitude in life.*" And he answers...

- (1) In the first place, for *those whose prayer is one of praise, if their whole life is to assume a prayerful attitude, they must carry this praise and gratitude into the smallest details of life [1]* and feel grateful for the slightest act of kindness done to them by anybody.

When a person has been able to attain this attitude of praise and thanksgiving for all things in life, then life may indeed be called a prayerful life.

PRACTICE: We begin with the practice: *Alhamdulillah* (hamdulillah or hamdullah)

(2) *Those who express a hope when they pray can turn their everyday striving into prayer* [2], provided they maintain this hope in every pursuit of life, putting their trust in God, and provided they consider all the objects of their desire as coming from one and the same source when they have gained these object.

PRACTICE: We begin with the practice: *Alhamdulillah* (hamdulillah or hamdullah)

(3) *Those who glorify God for God's beauty, should see the beauty of God in all God's creatures. It is of no use praising God for beauty, and then to criticize and find faults in God's creation* [3]; for one's life to be prayerful one must always seek the good in all of creation – everything, everyone, every circumstance.

PRACTICE: We begin with the practice: *Alhamdulillah* (hamdulillah or hamdullah)

(4) Those who **glorify God for the greatness of God's power** one must be able to see greatness in all of creation. *There are some who so pride themselves on their power, position, and money, so much so that they cannot see the greatness in another* [4]. For these it is of no avail to worship God for God's greatness; it is only lip service.

PRACTICE: We begin with the practice: *Alhamdulillah* (hamdulillah or hamdullah)

(5) As for the fifth class of people, **those who realize the truth of their being, they recognize their God-ideal in all of creation. They see their divine Beloved in all manifestation, in every name and form.** [5]

PRACTICE: We begin with the practice: *Alhamdulillah*, (hamdulillah or hamdullah)

*The sun and moon and the rain and clouds, all are busy to prepare your food for you,
and it is unfair indeed if you do not appreciate it in thanksgiving.*

– Muslih-ud-din Sa'di 1210-1291 (*Persian poet and prose writer*) –

In the east the works of Sa'di have been considered to be simple, educational, and at the same time uplifting. In India, Sa'adi's poem "Karima" is taught to children of nine and ten, and this work is not just a legend or an amusing story; it is like a seed sown in the heart of a child of that age, so that in time it may flourish and bring forth fruits of good thought and imagination. Karima is a poem of thanksgiving [extolling the of qualities generosity, nobleness, and honor]. In it the first lesson Sa'di gives is how to be grateful, how to express gratitude, how to appreciate; and he gives the lesson of gratefulness and appreciation for everything in the world, for the kindness and love of the mother and father, of the friend and the companion, by teaching first of all gratefulness to God for all the blessings and benefits we receive. Murshid says: Sa'di was a lover of humor.

Sa'di has tried in simple language to help us towards the development in our personality of the flower-like quality: to train our personality which was made to be a flower and not a thorn. Sa'di has called his books

“Gulistan”, which means a flowerbed or a rose-garden, and “Bustan”, a place of fragrance; and his whole life’s work was to explain how the heart can be turned into a flower and that it is made to spread its perfume. If only one can train the heart and tend the heart, it will show the delicacy and beauty and fragrance of a flower, and that is the purpose of our life.

PRACTICE: We begin with the practice: *Alhamdulillah*, (hamdulillah or hamdullah)

In the Gulistan Sa’di expresses wonderful thought. Here are a few lines from the Gulistan.

"Have patience. All things are difficult before they become easy."- Saadi

"I fear God the most, but after God, I fear those who don't fear God."- Saadi

"If a gem falls into mud it is still valuable. If dust ascends to heaven, it remains valueless."- Saadi

Interpretation: *If a gem falls into mud it is still valuable*, meaning that a person with good character, integrity, or true wisdom, ‘gem’ retains that value no matter what misfortunes or lowly situations they find themselves, or ‘falling into mud’.

The ‘mud’ or ‘heaven’ represents outward appearances or social standing, which do not change the fundamental nature of a person or a thing.

A person without substance or virtue is like the ‘dust’ that does not become valuable just because of a high rank, status, or position in society.

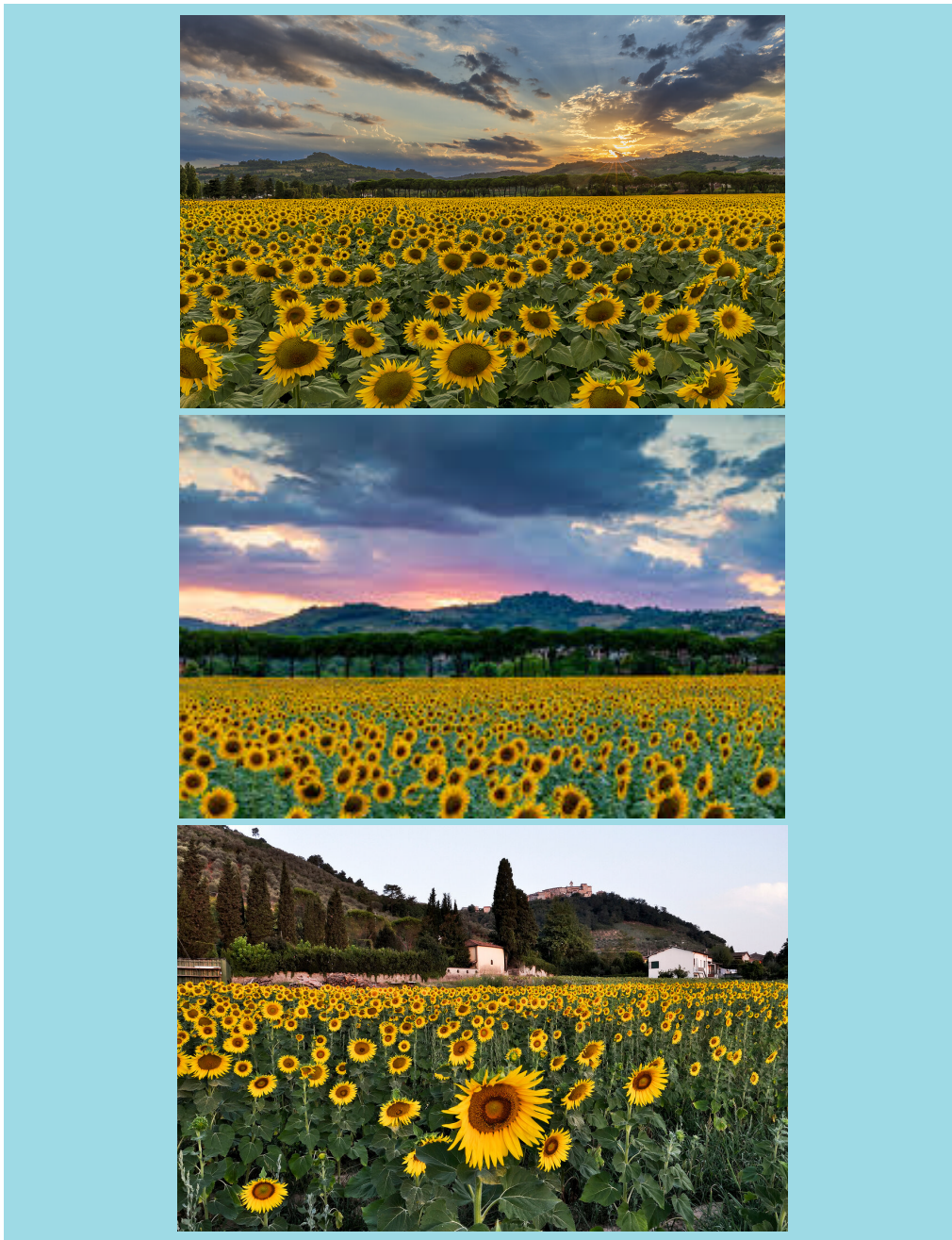
Let’s place our emphasis in life on moral character and the importance of our inner moral and ethical qualities over superficial appearances or social status.

Thich Nhat Hanh (At Home in the World) – *If you come to my home in France in the month of April, you won't see any sunflowers. Yet the farmers have already planted the sunflower seeds. They've put manure and compost in the soil, and everything is ready. In early June, the stems will already have grown one or two feet tall, and within a month the sunflowers will be blooming everywhere. Our practice is to cultivate good seeds in the soil of our mind, knowing that they will mature and bloom in their own time. If we look deeply enough, we can already see the sunflowers in April.*

Now referring back to Sa’di’s Gulistan: “*Every leaf of the tree becomes a page of the book, once the heart is opened and it has learnt to read.*”, and “*Every soul is meant for a certain purpose, and the light of that purpose has been kindled in that soul.*”- Saadi

Murshid gives us Ten Sufi Thoughts, Number III. “*There is One Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader.*”

PRACTICE: *Alhamdulillah*, (hamdulillah or hamdullah)



There is no mystification in Sa'di's poetry. It is full of wit and intelligence, and at the same time it is original. And the most wonderful thing that one finds in the poetry of Sa'di is his humorous turn of mind. It shows the rhythm and tune of the soul. Without humor life is dull and depressing. Humor is the reflection of that divine life and sun which makes life like a day full of sunshine. *And a person who reflects divine wisdom and divine joy adds to the expression of their thought when one expresses their ideas with amusement, especially as expressed in laughter.*

Sa'di wanted life to be joyous. Spirituality does not mean a long face and deep sighs. No doubt there are moments when we sympathize with the troubles of others; there are moments that move us to tears, and there are times when we must close our lips. But there are other moments when we can see the joyous side of life and enjoy its beauties. We are not born into this world for depression and unhappiness. Our very being is happiness. Depression is something unnatural. By this I do not mean to say that sorrow is a sin or that suffering is always avoidable. We all have to experience both in life, in order to accomplish the purpose of life. We cannot always be smiling, and there is no spiritual evolution in ignoring either side of life. As long as one is not bound, it is no sin to stand in the midst of life. We need not go into the forest away from everyone to show our goodness and virtue. Of what use is goodness and virtue if we bury ourself [or escape] in the forest? It is in the midst of life that we have to develop and express all that is beautiful and perfect and divine to our souls.

The works of Sa'di from beginning to end teach the first lesson of faith, which is to understand that we are not here in this world in vain, to waste our lives. We are here for a purpose, everyone for a particular purpose. Each one of us is an atom of this universe and completes the symphony, and when we do not strike our note it means that note is lacking in the symphony of the whole. When we do not fulfilled our life's purpose in the way for which we were created we are not living rightly and consequently we are not happy.

Our happiness depends on living rightly, and right living depends on striking our note; the realization of that purpose is in the book of our heart. Open that book and look at it. The aim of all meditation, concentration, and contemplation is only to open this book, to focus our mind, and to see what purpose there is in our life. And as soon as we see that our ultimate goal, our life's object and happiness, our true health and well-being, and our real wealth lie in the fulfillment of our purpose, then the whole trend of our life will change.

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Real generosity is an unfailing sign of spirituality. – Hazrat Inayat Khan

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References

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At Home in the World, Thich Nhat Hanh