

commentary



Saying “Thank you.”

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This Thanksgiving I am thankful for the phrase, “Thank you.” Growing up in India, I don’t remember ever saying “Thanks” or “Thank you” to anyone until the era of seventies began. As the custom of thanking each other was just catching up in the old country, I moved to the USA. It took me some time to get used to saying “Thanks” for every little things, but now I say this at least 50 times a day or more depending on the amount of interactions.

‘Thanks’ is a wonderful word. We say thank you for gifts, thank you for special favors, and thank you for assistance in times of need. But it's not only the big things where thank you matters. We also say thank you as we're handed our change in the store, thank you to someone who holds the door for us, and thank you to the person who passes us the salt at dinner table.

It's a phrase that is pretty much ubiquitous. But it's never unwelcome, and it can mean so much.

“Thank you” also reduces the need for elaborately explaining a situation to people we are not so familiar with. For example someone complemented me on my tie. Before I would have answered, “Oh, this is an old tie, I had it for years. It’s not so great.” Now I politely say, “Thank you.”

I play bridge. Suppose my partner said, “You played your hand really well.” My answer would have been, “Yeah, but I did miss that important play. Now I simply acknowledge by saying, “Thank you.

‘Thank you’ can also be used while comforting someone. Most people don't know what to say in such situations and may say something inappropriate in nervousness. I remember when someone’s father died, one of my friends consoled the person by saying, “I am sorry to hear about your father’s death. God gave you only one father and then took him away. I am glad that at least your mother is still alive.” He could have simply said, “Thank you for sharing that with me. I'm here for you.”

I have heard people complaining that saying ‘thank you’ is so mechanical it has lost its value. It’s overused. I also used to think so. But it’s easy to forget that no one ever needs to do anything for us. No one owes us anything. We don't have a right to be treated kindly. If we are treated well, it’s because someone cares for us enough to give us that privilege. It doesn't hurt anyone if we lower our pride and just say, “Thank you.”