

Dear Soul Songs Friends,

Here is an exercise you could do with your family at a special gathering. It is suitable for a birthday, an anniversary or any occasion when you'd like to share your gratitude for life or for particular people.

Young children especially enjoy this exercise. They catch on fast! I have used it with my grandchildren and their parents as a way to teach them the practice of Okagesamade—*“Because of you, this moment is possible; because of you, I am the person I am...”*

In the Northern Hemisphere in the fall, Canadians and Americans celebrate Thanksgiving. If you'd like to refresh your traditional Ritual of Thanks, you might try this:

- HINT: Plan ahead! This is a great activity to do while the meal is cooking. Our family has enjoyed sharing over dessert—definitely not while the meal is getting cold!
- Make a copy of the worksheet on page 2 for each guest.
- Explain that at dinner, we will be giving thanks for those people who have helped us in our lives.
- Have an adult pair off with a child. Walk through each column together, taking turns completing your own worksheet.
 - **Column One** is where you can list your specific gifts, skills or talents.
For example, *“I’m good at making spaghetti dinners.”*
Or *“I’m good at pitching a baseball or playing soccer.”*
Or *“I’m good at making up stories.”*
 - **Column Two** asks you to remember who helped you become skilled. Encourage the child to tell stories about this and you tell yours!
For example, *“My mom showed me how to make her special spaghetti sauce.”*
Or *“My sister showed me how to be a super-fast pitcher.”*
Or *“My granddad taught me how to tell what he called Tall Tales.”*
 - **Column Three** is where you get to express specific thanks, making a connection between Column One and Column Two. This is the value of telling stories first. The *more specific the thanks, the more genuine the thanks*. The child is learning Okagesamade organically.

For example, *“Thank you, Mom, for your patience when I learned to cook. I know you preferred to do everything by yourself but you made an exception and showed me how to make your sauce. Now, every time I make your special recipe, you are there by my side and in my heart.”*

When you gather, an option to enhance attentive listening is the practice of a *talking piece*. The group agrees that the *only one speaking is the one holding the talking piece*. Everyone else is listening. Small children—and introverts—absolutely love the notion of a talking piece! It’s so fair that, for a change, the conversation need not be dominated by the loud talkers who go on and on! My grandsons favored toy cars for their talking pieces. Now in their teens and twenties, they still bring out a talking piece when we gather.

Then, one by one, take turns listening as each person speaks, sharing from their worksheet. Expect to be surprised, friends! Usually, there is much laughter, some tears, and great joy at the heartfelt giving of thanks. May you be blessed by this beautiful practice!

Marti

