



October 2020

## The Healing Power of Gratitude

**“Wear gratitude like a cloak and it will feed every corner of your life” - Rumi**

Gratitude is an awareness of the good things that happen. It is both a fleeting emotion, and a quality anyone can acquire. In other words, you can be a grateful person, and experience a grateful moment. Gratitude is one of the healthiest emotions that can be practiced. Importantly, practice can help us cope in life by focusing on what we value, what is in our realm of influence, and what we can give back.

The pandemic has interrupted life in countless ways and creates significant personal experiences of distress, fear, loss, and uncertainty. Thankfully, in the midst of it all, we have an opportunity to bring into practice gratitude. Gratitude is an antidote to stress that in turn, can foster a stabilizing sense of ease, connection, kindness, energy, hope, and wellbeing among many other physical health benefits.

Gratitude is a key practice in response to and in support of misfortunes. Consider in your own life how learning, growth and expansion has occurred over the past months of challenges. Closing your eyes, and reflecting on how far you have come in the face of adversity, can be a wonderful beginning to a personal gratitude practice and accepting the way things are.

Giving thanks is one of the oldest concepts, however, current research shows that gratitude is much more than giving thanks. Coming from a place of gratitude defines how we see the world and also how we are in the world. Slowing down and becoming more grateful is a simple and powerful tool that is both comforting and empowering. The moment we shift from a negative perspective to one of appreciation our brain becomes more balanced and harmonized. We can enjoy the slowing of our breath, a sense of grounded-ness, and also spaciousness in our chest and heart.



**“In daily life we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy.”**

– David Steindl-Rast

### 1. Commitment

Making changes in ourselves for the good is not easy. A commitment to a gratitude practice is much of the work. It allows us to pause and savour moments in our life. With our intention and repetition, the process of neuroplasticity tells us that with a commitment to practice, our brain forms a new healthier pattern to follow. In other words, savouring a sense of goodness in our day becomes more natural and effortless over time and eventually makes us happier and more resilient overall. According to research, repetition is more powerful than duration so that a person can feel the benefits to a gratitude practice in just three minutes a day. In order to make change a habit, we can start with small goals such as this.

### 2. Gratitude with Ourselves

Gratitude can start with an individual practice just by slowing down and noticing. Research demonstrates that starting a gratitude journal and logging just “three good things” a day greatly improves our wellbeing. Also, we can look back at negative experiences in a new way by seeing how they helped shape us into our best selves today. This brings us into the present and helps us feel ready to face future challenges. The science of gratitude also states we can be grateful for what is yet to come and can, in turn, draw it to us by giving it thanks.

### 3. Gratitude in Relationships

Showing our appreciation for others expresses our gratitude. Some Buddhist traditions talk about family and friends as “beautiful flowers in the garden of humanity” and keeping our flowers watered through acts of kindness and words of appreciation. When we hear words of gratitude for ourselves we can also pause and enjoy these moments. In fact, a renowned study shows the number one predictor of a successful marriage is a level of gratitude ratio of 5:1. Couples are most likely to stay together if they share 5 appreciations for every one negative comment.

### 4. Gratitude with Children

Gratitude can be practiced with children by adults who can model, teach, and play fun activities. Children can focus in and use their unique strengths to be kind and help others. By discovering what is meaningful to them, they can find a social cause and put energy into making a difference. Gratitude walks can help children respect and appreciate nature. A family gratitude jar can be fun, as well as frequent gratitude check-ins while having relaxed family time together.

### 5. Gratitude in the Workplace

The more you seek out the good in your work, the more fulfilled you can become and the more positivity can build around you. Also, research shows great benefits to writing down three things they are thankful for in their role and their workplace. Simple notes, emails, and conversation to express appreciation for a colleague can also go a long way.



In conclusion, gratitude can be practiced throughout the day with ourselves or with others. Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of a gentle gratitude practice is from Mr. Rogers’ acceptance speech at the Lifetime Achievement Awards. Remembering to start small, here is his famous gratitude practice that left the audience speechless:

**“Would you just take, along with me, 10 seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are — those who have cared about you and wanted what was best for you in life. Whomever you’ve been thinking about... how pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they’ve made.”**



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