



“If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” – Meister Eckhart

Practicing Gratitude

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Good food to eat, my kids' laughter, glimpses of blue sky (I live in Seattle), our tight community of neighbors, for all these things, I am truly grateful.

T'is the season to count our blessings. While Thanksgiving encourages us to give thanks on the fourth Thursday of November, being grateful for our blessings throughout the year is a practice that enlivens us and fills us with joy.

Gratitude is Good for You

Gratitude shifts our perspective from what we lack to the abundance we already have. Research demonstrates that gratitude makes us happier. Studies done by Dr. Robert A. Emmons of the University of California, Davis, and Dr. Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami found that "gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships." Our thoughts and emotions influence our energy systems. Therefore, focusing on the things we are grateful for encourages a healthy energy system.

Thankfulness also connects us to others: the fleeting interaction with a stranger that lightens our day reminds us of humanity's goodness. When we say

"thank you" for the gifts others offer us, we deepen that connection by sharing our gratitude.

A Deeper Gratitude

According to Steve Taylor, Ph.D., there are three kinds of gratitude or appreciation: gratitude through absence, gratitude through comparison and conscious gratitude. The first two are dependent on external experiences. In gratitude through absence, we lose something that was taken for granted only to realize its value after it is gone. With gratitude through comparison, we appreciate our circumstances by comparing ourselves to others in less fortunate situations.

The third kind of gratitude "*is a distinctly different type of appreciation from the two previous types, in that it doesn't come from an external source. Conscious appreciation arises naturally from giving our full attention to our surroundings and our experience. . . It's the sense of natural appreciation we might feel when we feel relaxed and our minds are fairly quiet, and we perceive the world around us freshly and directly. . . These moments of appreciation are so important because they show us a glimpse of reality. After all, in most appreciation experiences, we only become aware of what is already there, what was always there, but which we have stopped paying attention to. Our lives are filled with*



blessings which we forget to count.”¹ This third kind of gratitude, conscious appreciation, is the gratitude we can cultivate through practice.

Practicing Gratitude

The list of methods for practicing gratitude may be familiar. The trick is making gratitude a habit, a way of thinking that flows freely and naturally from our deepest selves. That’s where the *practice* part comes in, meaning we do something over and over until we get better at it. The list below is to get you started. It doesn’t matter so much *what* you do to cultivate gratitude as *how often* you do it.

Gratitude journal - Each week, write down what you were grateful for during the week. Describe the situation, include how you felt and take time periodically to review the abundance from past weeks.

Gratitude list - This can be a quick list written at the end of each day or shared with the people in your household. Every evening at the dinner table, my husband, kids and I share at least one thing we are thankful for. Not only does this cultivate a habit of gratitude in each of us, it also builds our family connections as together we celebrate the good things in our lives.

Gratitude prayer - Start your day with an acknowledgment of all the goodness in your life. Doing so can set the tone for the rest of the day.

Say “thank you” - While a common curtesy, remembering to genuinely express our gratitude to others keeps our perspective aligned with the positive in our lives.

Write thank you notes - In this age of sound bites, email, Facebook and Twitter, who doesn’t love receiving an old-fashioned thank you note in the mail? Holding it in your hands, reading it time and again connects us with others and reminds us of our own

capacity for kindness. However, writing thank you notes is a practice that benefits the writer as well as the recipient by focusing us on the gifts we receive.

This season, as we remember the first Thanksgiving, let us follow the example of Native Americans who have been especially eloquent about voicing gratefulness, as in this Iroquois prayer:

*We give thanks to our mother, the earth,
which sustains us.*

*We give thanks to the rivers and streams,
which supply us with waters.*

*We give thanks to all herbs, which furnish medicine for
the cure of our diseases.*

*We give thanks to the corn, and to her sisters, the beans
and the squashes, which give us life.*

*We give thanks to the wind, which moving the air has
banished diseases.*

*We give thanks to the moon and the stars, which have
given us their light when the sun was gone.*

*We give thanks to the sun, which has looked upon the
earth with a beneficent eye.*

*Lastly, we give thanks to the Great Spirit, in whom is
embodied all goodness, and who directs all things for
the good of earth’s children.*

May you be blessed this season with an awareness of all you have to be grateful for. ☺

1. “In Praise of Gratitude,” Harvard Health Publications, Harvard Medical School, November 2011. Web. 15 Sept. 2014.