

Gratitude

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them. John F. Kennedy

After affirmations, I like to add in the practice of gratitude. Combined, these help get you connected to your heart, help you change perspective, and powerfully reframe your life.

What do you think of when you hear the word gratitude? That you need to be grateful for what you have? Perhaps you see it as a fashionable practice? A way to remember to say thank you for what you have? Something else?

Gratitude is our way of saying thank you for something we value, for blessings, miracles and unexpected gifts. It's a feeling that emanates from the heart and, therefore, from a place of love. It helps you to connect with spirit, divine inner wisdom and consciousness. It also keeps you grounded in the real world.

Every culture in the world has a word for thank you. It is often a word that we take for granted. Consider when you go for a meal, and the waiter or waitress places your food in front of you, I assume you would automatically say thank you. Just as you would if someone held a door open. What about when you receive a gift?

Gratitude is saying thank you and appreciating your gifts, no matter where these come from. They could be innate gifts that you take for granted, e.g. the way that your body knows how to heal, the gifts from Mother Nature, gifts of kindness from friends and strangers, the gift of love from your dogs, a present for your birthday, and any gift that arrives unexpectedly.

Gratitude is a feeling that comes from the heart and reaches all parts of your body. Of course, it is also a choice, you can choose to be grateful for what you have, or you can take it for granted and assume you will always have it – but you wouldn't do that, would you?

Gratitude is an attitude – a way of being where you do not take things for granted, and it shows up in the way you are. Gratitude creates connections – within and with everything around you. It strengthens the bond you have with your mind, body, spirit and soul and others you meet. It creates a powerful energetic resonance.

What do you notice about the way your life changes when you express gratitude for what you have? What do you notice about others? Can you even tell if someone practices gratitude? People who practice gratitude are often generous and do things like random acts of kindness without any expectation of getting something back. I think what I notice about others is that they seem humble, kind, generous, content and have an air of inner peace.

What is appreciation?

Many of us use the words gratitude and appreciation interchangeably.

- Gratitude is about saying thank you, a feeling and an attitude
- Appreciation is acknowledging the perceived value for what you get and the meaning you place on the gift. It's where you create a positive emotional connection

The way that I look at it is that I say I am grateful and then feel appreciation. I am grateful that I awaken to the birds singing and am able to see a glorious sunrise. I appreciate the beauty of Mother Earth and know that I am lucky to live in a beautiful part of the world.

You may find that you feel grateful for something and may not appreciate it. Let's consider the body. You may be thankful for what it does to support you without fully acknowledging that from the tiniest cell that every tissue, organ, and system is finely calibrated to keep you moving, healthy and alive.

You can be grateful for the food on your table and then take it a step further and appreciate the person who prepared it, the flavour and nutritional value and how that supports a healthy body.

When thinking of appreciation, consider the value that something provides and what value you get from it. When you know the source of your gratitude, you will start to fully appreciate what is available to you.

What is a gratitude practice?

Practising gratitude starts by paying attention and taking the time to notice what is going on. When you wake in the morning, how do you feel about the sleep quality that you experienced? What about the gorgeous breakfast or the shower that was magically just the right temperature? What about when you look at your face in the mirror? Do you feel grateful that the person looking back at you got you to this point? As you emerge from the house and look up into the morning sky, do you behold it in wonder?

Gratitude, along with appreciation, helps you to cultivate a meaningful framework for life and the gifts that you receive. Everything is a gift, even the rubbish stuff. Through every experience, you learn something and make conscious choices through that learning.

The practise of gratitude helps you to develop a conscious connection with everything. Imagine that you are ill, and by practising gratitude, your body responds and heals quickly. What about if you find yourself lost and someone goes out of their way to show you the way you need to go, or they help you out if you find yourself in a not too favourable situation.

What are the benefits of practising gratitude?

- Creates strong foundations for all areas of your life
- Increased happiness, contentment and positive mood

- Less toxic, negative emotions that could cause a physical impact on the body
- A sense of inner peace
- More satisfaction with life
- Less materialistic
- Better able to deal with stress
- Better health
- Better sleep
- Greater resiliency
- Encourages the development of kindness, patience, humility, and wisdom
- Helps you to manifest magic and bring more abundance into your life

Practising gratitude creates contentment, inner peace and compassion

When you are grounded, connected with Mother Earth, content and find yourself in a place of inner peace, you will feel greater compassion for yourself and others. As a consequence, you will attract the right people and things into your life. Best of all is the development of self-love. The Dalai Lama says: "If you don't love yourself, you cannot love others. If you have no compassion for yourself, then you are not capable of developing compassion for others."

What gratitude does is create the right foundations and environment for you to be the best version of yourself. When you put yourself first, learn to love and appreciate all that you are and have, you build a pot of energy from which you can fuel and nurture yourself. If you don't have a bucket full of love and energy for yourself, how will you be able to support others or live your best life – on purpose and with meaning?

I learned that gratitude and appreciation for how my body knew how to heal, given the right ingredients, gave me back my life. I had worked on loving myself before having fractures, so that helped and supported my healing process. It is with this knowledge that I continue to reap the rewards of this practice.

Gratitude transforms your past, present and future

Gratitude has changed my life, and it can change yours too. As you focus on being grateful, it will help you reframe that past to see things differently. It's about understanding that life happens for you, not to you, and to thank you for these gifts. This will enable you to be more in the present. As you reframe life from the perspective of gratitude, the way that you approach the future will change. I am sure that when you reflect back, you will notice incredible learning.

When you focus on how far you have travelled rather than dwelling on the bad stuff, you will find life far more rewarding. When you see a progression, you will feel better about yourself. This will encourage you to go forward again.

The way that each of us remembers the past and encodes it is very personal. Therefore our ability to see these incidents and gain perspective will be different to someone else. One person may make quicker progress, which may be because they have been working of

themselves in other ways and practising gratitude for longer than you. Everyone will progress at the right rate for them.

In moving forward, it's not just practising gratitude that will help you to progress. You may find that you need to work on boundaries, forgiveness, self-love and other things as well. The good news is as you work out what you need to do and focus on being grateful for the gifts you have been given, you will progress and change how you feel about your past and the opportunities that your future presents.

When the past is viewed through a different lens, this will change how you live in the present moment. I like to see the past as a set of experiences that fuels me to be a better person. These memories are like an encyclopaedia, rather than a place to dwell. The events of the past inspire me to live my best life every day. How you remember your past is your choice, you can focus on the pain or the learning you have gained.

My past was pretty messy and not pleasant, and I do occasionally slip into anger and shame, but not for long. I look at what comes up and ask myself why now and what do I need to learn? Where are the gifts, and how can I grow from this? From this position, I can design how I live today and how I move into my tomorrows.

There are always going to be challenges and stuff that comes along to knock your confidence and dreams, but once again, how you view these things will help you reframe and make better choices about what you will do.

To fully enjoy being in the now, you need to appreciate what you have. Gratitude in the now is all about appreciating fully what you have. When you wake in the morning, what do you think about? If you took a moment to appreciate where you are and what you have, how would that set your day up? Ask yourself, how do I want this day to go? And how would I like to feel?

Imagine starting your day affirming and acknowledging all of the beauty within you and around you. Imagine acknowledging that you are an amazing person with fabulous skills and experiences to share. How would that change how you approach your day?

What if you knew that you could have a gorgeous day today and every day by focusing on what you could create, by appreciating what you have. We are in charge of where we are going, even though it may not always feel like it. It's our life, our story and our choice about how we create the world in which we live and love.

What if you were already grateful for the future to come? We know that visualisation is powerful. So, if you added gratitude for the future to come, how would that be? Can you imagine what experiences you want to have and how you would like to feel? By being grateful today and reframing yesterday, you have the ability to consciously create a future that you will love.

How not to practice gratitude

Make it an enjoyable practice, and don't try too hard. Constructing massive lists and always being appreciative might get a little overwhelming. You may also feel resentful if you are

extending gratitude to someone who isn't worthy. Consider any unhelpful or toxic relationships that you may want to let go of. Be grateful for the lesson, let go and let love.

Stop and think for a moment if you are the kind of person to downplay your success and achievements. Remember to own your greatness while saying thank you to others for supporting you. You can express gratitude AND take appropriate credit for your own successes.

And finally, not all situations are worthy of gratitude and appreciation. Be true to your heart and show up authentically. Remember, gratitude is a feeling that comes into the heart.

What to expect

What should you expect to experience as you practice gratitude? Here are a few things to consider:

- It may feel like a chore. That's the same with lots of things, and if you don't stick to it, you will never feel the benefits
- It will take time until you start to notice the benefits. This will vary from person to person. The more you practice, the stronger the feelings and benefits become
- At first, you may notice some negative stuff coming in. This is normal. Observe what is happening, explore and reflect. Over time more positive emotions will be the norm
- Eventually, you will look at life differently, and your attitude to others will change

How gratitude changes you and your brain

We are all sculptors of our own mind and body. The mind is an incredible creation and one which we are only just beginning to understand, despite years of research. It is both highly adaptable and flexible in more ways than we can fathom. Yet, we only scratch the surface of its capabilities.

Most of our primary functions are governed by our subconscious. For example, when it comes to movement, our brain sends out messages along our nerves to various muscles in our bodies to perform specific functions. With repetition, the network of neurons in our brains become efficient at learning how to do the things that we habitually do – so habits are formed. When you learn something new, the old pathways can become redundant as new routes are created. This is why we have the phrase use it or lose it. And, of course, there may be pathways that we'd rather forget.

As we go through our days, our minds and bodies are continually tweaking and making thousands of adjustments to make the best possible decision in any given situation. As you experience slowing it down, getting connected to you and practising gratitude, your neurological pathways rewire.

The brain is like any muscle. It needs training if we want it to perform in a particular way. By practising gratitude, you get into a flow state of conscious love and connection. The new

thoughts that you have will create new realities. We are not our thoughts, but by choosing a new life menu, we are taking responsibility for a new mindset and trusting that it will be truly delicious when the food of life arrives.

You can change lifelong habits and unhelpful thoughts within a few days. Naturally, it will take time for the practice and attitude of gratitude to kick in but kick in it will. Our subconscious will make the necessary changes if allowed to. That means as you start your gratitude practice, you may notice intruding thoughts. If you observe these without judgement, allowing them to be neither right nor wrong, you will find that they will change.

As your practice develops, you will design an internal code for your values, beliefs, habits and behaviours. When you explore your future from an as if state, you create visions that your mind will be happy to investigate. Imagery is the preferred language of our subconscious. Give it a vision, and it will do miraculous things to bring it into being.

Most great things in your life will have started with a dream that you want to create. But life gets in the way. Practising daily gratitude and envisioning fuels our future plans. The key is to keep practising; otherwise, like a plant that isn't watered, your dreams will wither and die.

If we stay true to our vision, continuously taking the path that best aligns with it, and put in the hard work, keep focused on what you are grateful for and will be grateful for, nature will take its course, and our visions will soon become our reality.

I believe humans are always in pursuit of bettering themselves. That often means that we might forget to celebrate our successes and achievements. Gratitude is a way of celebrating. When you acknowledge your accomplishments and state what you are thankful for your mind will know what to go after – the good stuff. This will naturally keep you motivated to do more. This gives you purpose and a reason to be.

Celebrating strengthens our positive intention towards continuing the same behaviour. It is an important part of our living our best lives.

We hear of spiritual leaders, musicians, writers, actor and athletes all being connected and inflow when performing. Connection isn't just for the chosen few. When you practice gratitude, you will find that you are connected to a deeper part of you that wants to flow love around your body and out into the world. The truth is that you have always been connected. You just didn't notice.

When you remain in gratitude, amazing things will happen. Your health will improve, as will your relationships, you'll feel more grounded and connected to your heart, inner wisdom and to the people and things around you.

Being thankful for every moment will open a gateway to your higher self, your spirituality and consciousness. Enjoy every second as you meet your greatest self.

Life is not a dress rehearsal. You are alive and on this beautiful planet for such a small period of time, so why not cherish every day as if it is your last? There is no greater gift or anything more valuable than the value of each day. If you change your focus from doing to

being, you will open up to more opportunities and probably more fun, as well as discovering inner peace and contentment.

Journal it: Now it's your turn, take a few moments to reflect on the last few months of your life. What are you grateful for? Big or small, it doesn't matter. Simply write and reflect.

Gratitude journaling magic

Gratitude turns what we have into enough. Anonymous

Giving thanks makes you happy. Journaling helps to create change. Bring them both together, and that is the amazing power of word alchemy. When you write about what you appreciate, there is a vibration that is carried to the page. Try writing and then moving your hands over the words. I wonder what you will sense? Try it again by saying what you are grateful for. How does that change the energy for you? Gratitude journaling creates a magical vibrational energy that flows throughout your being and out into the world.

Your gratitude journal

As you go about your day, engage your five senses as often as possible so that you become aware of the things you can feel grateful for and appreciate. Then take a moment to be present to each element as you notice it and become aware of your feelings. Also, go deeper and fully understand what has been made available to you. Remember your affirmation and reflect on this. When it comes to gratitude, write anything from the mundane, material, magical to the magnificent while focusing on the heart chakra area – also, remember to connect to your roots for grounding.

Challenges and lessons

What challenges and lessons came up from the things you felt gratitude for. In writing this, it will open your awareness to the deeper meaning of gratitude.

Gifts

What gifts did the things you are grateful for, plus the challenges and lesson? Why do you consider them to be gifts?

Appreciation

Remember to consider the source of your gratitude and appreciate the abundance that is coming into your life. Regular gratitude and appreciation will rev up your energy and help you to create a more loving and fulfilling life.

Journal it: When you begin your gratitude practice recall what you have noticed during the day or week. When you are ready, write at least three things you are grateful for stated in the present tense. State I am grateful for... For example:

- I am grateful that it is safe to love me
- I am grateful that I am surrounded by beautiful and loving friends and family

- I am grateful for my healthy boundaries and kind heart

When you have finished writing what you are grateful for, breath in love from your root chakra, up your body and into your heart and connect to your appreciation.

The roots of your gratitude

When you start your gratitude practice, consider the roots of your gratitude. Take a few moments to connect to what you are grateful for and follow the pathway or story. You will be fascinated by what comes up. It's important as you follow the roots to stay out of the story and to become a witness to what you observe. You may see, feel or sense memories, images, feelings, sounds, smells or tastes. Make a note and use them to learn from. As you consider what you are grateful for, you can also focus on what you need daily to survive and thrive. When you feel grounded and safe, you will feel confident that the Universe is fully supporting your needs.

The heart of your gratitude

Next, bring your heart into your gratitude practice. It's important as you connect with your heart, as this will enable your heart to open and to fully feel appreciation. You can do this with the three hearts meditation. Take as long as you like, and when you feel connected, you can start to write what you are grateful for today. When you have finished writing what you are grateful for, breathe out love from your heart.

As you become comfortable with connecting with the roots and heart of your gratitude, start exploring your gratitude more curiously. By that, I mean, perhaps take a bit more time to notice, or have a few more conversations with your heart, play with the energy and have fun.

Remember to combine your gratitude practice with any of the other practices described.