

GRATITUDE

WHAT EXACTLY IS GRATITUDE?

Gratitude is different from indebtedness. Gratitude is an experience, an emotional state of pleasure and openness which often includes a welling up or sense of overwhelm when we recognize the value in life experiences and (without the religiosity of the word but) the miracles in our life. It is appreciating something or someone not simply on the surface but everything else about that person, place or thing - recognising the intricacies of life.

Someone gives you an apple. Where did the apple come from? What did it take for the apple to even come into existence? The cosmos, the earth, the sun, the soil, a seed, water, the appropriate conditions in harmony to provide nourishment that allowed the seed to sprout and the tree to grow. That then produced blossoms that transformed into the fruit. The insects that pollinated the blossoms. The worm that didn't eat the apple. The person who harvested the fruit and more likely it didn't come to you directly from that



person but then was sent to a market in bulk. The driver of the vehicle that transported it, the store's stock person who put it on the shelf, and the cashier who made the transaction with the person who bought it so they could then give it to you. Did I forget something? All of that for an apple to be given to you. A chain of events that gave you nourishment.

FOR ALL THE EXTREMES AND IN-BETWEENS

Life on earth, some people like to refer to it as a journey. That sounds nice and being on a journey sounds more like an exciting adventure. The journey can be that and then there are times that it isn't, instead, being extremely unpleasant, challenging and difficult. Other times, it's exciting and challenging but in a good way. We might even feel like nothing can go wrong and we're on top of the world. The practice of gratitude requires a commitment to be grateful for all of it.

GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE EXTREMES AND IN-BETWEENS

I considered myself a skilled practitioner in expressing my gratitude and feeling grateful, until one day the end of a long-term relationship challenged me and it seemed as if I was sucked into a vortex of suffering. I found myself suffering over my suffering and trapped. The feeling of loneliness during that time was very intense as well. On top of that ending, I was also physically ill. Both my physical and mental bodies were bruised and wounded.

Without even realising it, I stopped practising gratitude. It wasn't on purpose.

The only certainty we have in life is change.

I was miserable. Getting out of some intense feelings isn't always easy. We can get stuck and even feel like we're trapped in a maelstrom of suffering, feeling so far gone that we forgot what it feels like to be in life's flow or to be happy again. That's where gratitude can really help to turn things around.

Something had to give, I was tired of living this way - it wasn't real life at all. So I started once again a gratitude practice which when things are going well it's very easy to do - it's when things are tough that it can seem impossible.

Every day I woke up and say thank you to existence, that I was grateful for my life, for simply waking.

I didn't believe it.

On my worst days - and there were a lot of them in the beginning - I said a series of statements expressing gratitude for my life as it was and I didn't mean it. Even though I felt like I was lying to myself, I was committed to the practice, I would do it because I knew deep down that it was true.

It was easier to look outside myself and see my dogs sleeping and think how grateful I am to have them in my life or look at the plants in my living space and simply be grateful for them. Then I would search for something else and if I struggled to find something else - struggling at times and feeling frustrated would just list anything - coffee, birds, trees, my home, etc.

Then one day, I woke up and started to recite all the reasons why I was grateful for my life and I actually believed it.

Poet Rudyard Kipling said in his poem "IF" ...

*If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;*

So choose gratitude when you meet with triumph and disaster. Savour and be grateful for all the extremes and all the in-betweens. Because our experiences will bring both happiness and sadness, and both are fleeting.