

Gratitude

Adapted from *Heart to Heart* by Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins

Readings

Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.

- Helen Keller

Gratitude is heaven itself.

- William Blake

Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way.

- Native American Prayer

Just as millions of snowflakes pile up to create a blanket of snow, the “thank yous” we say pile up and fall gently upon one another until, in our hearts and minds, we are adrift in gratitude.

- Daphne Rose Kingma

To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives - the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections - that requires hard spiritual work.

- Henri Nouwen

Consider This

Gratitude is both a feeling and a spiritual practice. Though we have little control over our immediate feelings, we can decide to cultivate the ground in which those feelings thrive.

“Thank you” adds a human connection, it says, “I noticed you were there, and I am glad.” Words of thanks signal acknowledgement of another’s part in benefitting our lives. Our thank-yous remind us that we are dependent on those around us. The words acknowledge the web of relationships in which we live. To neglect one’s thank-yous is not only rude; it is out of touch with reality, an implicit claim of independence and privilege.

Sometimes we are suffering too much to feel honestly grateful. There are days, even weeks or months, when we are overwhelmed by problems or pain, tragedy or disappointment. When we can’t feel grateful, we can’t. At least, we can’t right now. The

suffering person surely still has some good things in his or her life, but this realization has to come from within. Sometimes when things are hard, especially if they are awful for a long time, we can resolve to make a practice of gratitude - to really work at re-establishing our sense of thanksgiving. This is a very healing process. Being intentional about noticing the things we are grateful for is a deep spiritual practice.

Perhaps most insidious to our sense of gratitude is the great demon, busyness. There are times when we simply get too busy to notice all the wonderful things and people and relationships around us. Because it is so easy to get revved up to such a pitch that we neglect to notice our gratitude, it is best to find ways to make gratitude a routine. Sometimes people keep a gratitude list, photographs of people, places & things they are grateful for, bring their gratitude to mind over their coffee, evening meal or at bedtime by naming something they are grateful for. W.H. Auden once wrote “that on the dull days of life, we must practice our ‘scales of rejoicing’.” We can make a practice of our gratitude that will sustain us in both the wonderful and difficult times of our lives.

Questions

- 1) What spoke to you (or didn't speak to you) from the readings?
- 2) How do you cultivate a thankful heart and what gets in the way of experiencing gratitude?
- 3) How have you found ways to be grateful for the ways that life turned out, rather than the ways you expected it to be?

Some Activities to Cultivate Gratitude

Words of Gratitude - select a quotation on gratitude or write out your own sentence of something you're grateful for. Write it out in calligraphy, embroider it, carve it in wood, or illustrate it with a drawing or photograph.

Wristband Gratitude - The opposite of gratitude is complaint. Wear a wristband and everytime you complain about something, move the wristband to the opposite wrist. Additionally you can find something in that moment to be grateful for. Adapted from Will Bowen's *A Complaint Free World*.

Scale of Rejoicing - Think of the tune, Do re mi fa sol la ti do from *Sound of Music*. Find 8 things you are grateful for and replace them in the song. Sing or Chant your scales throughout the day, like when waiting at a red light or waiting for water to boil.