Mindfulness Meditation Group

Week 7
Gratitude

Gratitude is essentially the acknowledgment of the positive things that come our way that we did not actively work toward. The Latin root of the word gratitude is *grata* or *gratia* – a given gift – and from this same root we get our word grace, which means a gift freely given that is unearned.

Gratitude is a feeling that spontaneously emerges from within. However, it is not simply an emotional response; it is also a choice we make. We can choose to be grateful, or we can choose to be ungrateful – to take our gifts and blessings for granted. As a choice, gratitude is an attitude or disposition. As writer Alexis de Tocqueville once described it, gratitude is “a habit of the heart.”

- Angeles Arrien “Living in Gratitude”

Gratefulness is the inner gesture of giving meaning to our life by receiving life as gift. It enables us to find peace in all circumstances by freeing us from resentment. To be *grateful* is more than being thankful for what we perceive to be beneficial. It is our courageous trust that life itself – kind or harsh, happy or sad – is good, if only we receive it as a gift. The moment we trust in this truth, we are at peace. A person at peace will serve as an agent of peace in the world.

-Adapted from Brother David Steindl-Rast
http://www.gratefulness.org
Gratitude Journal Exercise

1. Describe something lucky that happened to your last year and how your life improved.
2. Describe a peak experience from the year, what made it special, and why you’re grateful for it.
3. Describe a special favor you received, how it helped you, and how it touched you.
4. Describe a special gift or talent you have, how you use it, and why you are grateful for it.
5. Name someone you know who makes your life better and why.
6. Think of something you used today that other people make take for granted.
7. What do you appreciate the most about one person who is in this group with you?
8. Describe something you are particularly grateful for in your life and why.
9. Describe something that you do often that makes you happy and why.
10. Describe something that happened this past week that you are grateful for and why.
11. Describe something you have done that you are particularly proud of and why.
Gratitude Meditation

Gratitude is a gracious acknowledgment of all that sustains us, a bow to our blessings, great and small, an appreciation of the moments of good fortune that sustain our life every day. We have so much to be grateful for.

Gratitude is confidence in life itself. It is not sentimental, not jealous, nor judgmental. Gratitude does not envy or compare. Gratitude receives in wonder the myriad offerings of the rain and the earth, the care that supports every single life.

As gratitude grows it gives rise to joy. We experience the courage to rejoice in our own good fortune and in the good fortune of others.

Joy is natural to an open heart. In it, we are not afraid of pleasure. We do not mistakenly believe it is disloyal to the suffering of the world to honor the happiness we have been given.

Like gratitude, joy gladdens the heart. We can be joyful for people we love, for moments of goodness, for sunlight and trees, and for the breath within our breast. And as our joy grows we finally discover a happiness without cause. Like an innocent child who does not have to do anything to be happy, we can rejoice in life itself, in being alive.

Let yourself sit quietly and at ease. Allow your body to be relaxed and open, your breath natural, your heart easy. Begin the practice of gratitude by feeling how year after year you have cared for your own life. Now let yourself begin to acknowledge all that has supported you in this care:

*With gratitude I remember the people, animals, plants, insects, creatures of the sky and sea, air and water, fire and earth, all whose joyful exertion blesses my life every day.*

*With gratitude I remember the care and labor of a thousand generations of elders and ancestors who came before me.*

*I offer my gratitude for the safety and well-being I have been given.*

*I offer my gratitude for the blessing of this earth I have been given.*

*I offer my gratitude for the measure of health I have been given.*

*I offer my gratitude for the family and friends I have been given.*

*I offer my gratitude for the community I have been given.*

*I offer my gratitude for the teachings and lessons I have been given.*

*I offer my gratitude for the life I have been given.*

Just as we are grateful for our blessings, so we can be grateful for the blessings of others.

Continue to breathe gently. Bring to mind someone you care about, someone it is easy to rejoice for. Picture them and feel the natural joy you have for their well-being, for their happiness and success. With each breath, offer them your grateful, heartfelt wishes:
May you be joyful.

May your happiness increase.

May you not be separated from great happiness.

May your good fortune and the causes for your joy and happiness increase.

Sense the sympathetic joy and caring in each phrase. When you feel some degree of natural gratitude for the happiness of this loved one, extend this practice to another person you care about. Recite the same simple phrases that express your heart’s intention.

Then gradually open the meditation to include neutral people, difficult people, and even enemies—until you extend sympathetic joy to all beings everywhere, young and old, near and far.

This excerpt is taken from the book, “The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace”

Jack Kornfield
How to Develop a Gratitude Mindset
by: Tamara Lechner

Gratitude is the feeling of reverence for things that are given, according to Bob Emmons Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis and the founding editor-in-chief of The Journal of Positive Psychology.

Many of us spend most of the year thinking about what we want and what’s next. It’s not until Thanksgiving that we’re reminded to think about what we’re grateful for and how to express that gratitude.

Expressing thanks shouldn’t be a once-a-year tradition. It is possible to cultivate a gratitude mindset that will stick with you throughout the year. A gratitude mindset means lower levels of envy, anxiety, and depression as well as increased optimism and well-being. Research recently conducted at University of California-Davis found gratitude gives the person expressing it the power to heal, to be energized, and to change lives.

What Are the Benefits of Gratitude?

Gratitude can impact the physical, psychological, and social aspects of an individual’s well-being, studies show. Positive psychology sees gratitude as one of the keys in turning potential negatives into positives. Here are some of the benefits that come from adopting a gratitude mindset.

**Physical benefits:**
- a stronger immune system
- less bothered by aches and pains
- lower blood pressure
- sleep longer and feel more rested upon awakening

**Social benefits:**
- more compassionate, generous, and helpful
- more forgiving
- more outgoing
- feel less lonely or isolated

**Psychological benefits:**
- higher levels of positive emotion
- more alert, alive, awake
- more joy and pleasure
- more optimism and happiness
Gratitude Meditation

I will be bringing your awareness to things in your life that you are thankful for.

Just give gratitude the chance to come up naturally. And when it comes up just let yourself sink into the feeling, surrender to it. Notice how it feels in your body, how your energy feels. And if it doesn’t come up that’s ok, you don’t need to try to make yourself feel it. Just surrender to your heart not your head.

So let’s flash through all aspects of your life that you might be grateful for.

Firstly bring your awareness to your breath, as you inhale and as you exhale and the fact that each of these breaths gives you life.

Then, be aware of your heart beating, pulsing, filling with love and compassion and peace, and flowing that back out.

Bring your awareness to your eyes, that let you see color, faces, smiles, nature, the sunrise, the sunset, the rainbow, the moon and the stars, yourself in the mirror.

Bring your awareness to your ears, that beam in sound, music, laughter, the voices of those you love, the silence, the beautiful sounds of life.

Bring your awareness to your nose, that smells the ocean breeze, the aroma of sweet perfume, the flowers, the trees, newly cut grass, the wafting smells that come from the kitchen, cupcakes in the oven.

Bring your awareness to your lips and mouth, that tastes and savors and nourishes, kisses and speaks, that whispers, and sings.

Bring your awareness to your hands that hold and touch, and caress, and open and close, and applaud, and squeeze, the arms and shoulders that carry and hug and lift and stretch.

Our feet, our toes, the gift to wiggle them, transport you, walk, run, dangle, dance, kick, fold, leap and point.

What about your tears, your sorrows, in the strength that you seem to be able to muster, to make it through each day.

Bring your awareness to your abundance, your expansion, your evolution, your perspective shifts, the affluence and flow and empathy and love and light, and your ability to see growth, and potential in every moment.

Now just breathe and feel more grace, and ease.

And now experience the warmth, love and compassion that gratitude brings into your heart.

Drift your awareness to nurturing relationships in your life, the new ones and the older ones.

Material things that came to you unexpectedly, things that flow to you with great effort and commitment, hard work.
Think of love in your life, and your connection to those things that are sweet, and loving and honorable, and just feel right.

When we no longer take life for granted, we become grateful for everything that we have.

Just breathe and feel this flow.
3 Quick Gratitude Boosters

Gratitude is stronger when it is shared. To sustain your gratitude mindset, find a way to verbalize, write it down, or share through social media. Just like meditation is a practice, so too is gratitude.

**Keep a Gratitude Journal:** At the end of each day, make a list of three things you are grateful for. Think of everything from running water and a cozy bed to no red lights during your commute and having a great friend at work. The list can be endless! As you practice, you strengthen the neural pathways that help you find even more things to be grateful for. Pretty soon, gratitude will be your attitude.

In one study funded by the John Templeton Foundation as part of the Greater Good Science Center’s Expanding Gratitude Project, middle school students listed five things they were grateful for—for two weeks. They were then compared to a control group documenting their everyday events. At the end, the gratitude group reported more satisfaction with their school experience.

**Write a Gratitude Letter:** Choose someone who has made a positive impact on your life. Write he or she a letter explaining how and thanking them. Be specific and include lots of description. You can either mail the letter or just tuck it away. Expressing your gratitude heightens it.

**Receive Gratefully:** Many of us are better givers than receivers. Put your focus on your experience of receiving gratitude. When you’re given a compliment, do you belittle yourself by saying “it was nothing” or by playing down your role? Notice your experience as a recipient and try to receive complements or thanks with grace. The law of giving and receiving places equal emphasis on both sides. Gratitude is essential for happiness. By setting the intention to prioritize gratitude, you have already begun to adopt the mindset. So thank yourself!