

Gratitude Meditation or Journaling Exercise

The practice of gratitude can transform our life. Over the last 30 years, studies have shown that gratitude improves our physical and mental health, in addition to our relationships, social skills, emotional intelligence, sleep, problem-solving abilities, as well as our overall capacity for happiness. The art of gratitude is to find the perfection in the imperfect.

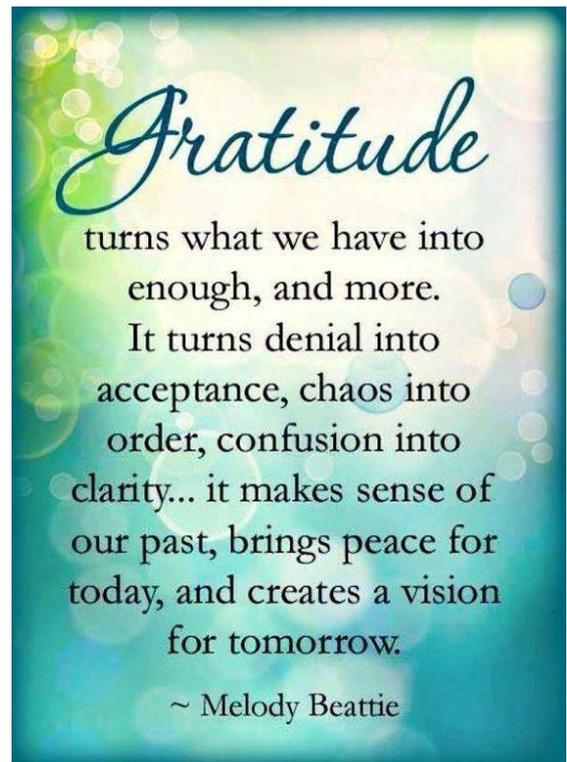
In this exercise, which can be used as a meditation or a journaling practice, we take the time to pause, to appreciate what we may normally dismiss or take for granted in our lives. We turn our attention to the good, savouring moments of joy. We notice what we have, rather than what we have not. We pay attention to what is enough. We stop and then we find a way to express our gratitude, first, to ourselves but also when we can we take the opportunity to express it to others. In this way, we are re-wiring our mind to notice and take in the good.

We observe the inner critic, who is constantly negatively judging ourselves, others and our surroundings. Instead, we become curious, aware of the negative bias of our mind and we cultivate another voice within, that appreciates and see the good. It takes an effort initially to focus on the positives. Our brain is wired to mostly notice problems such as what is wrong, what we don't like, what we fear or what we have lost, as well as lack, inadequacies and failures in ourselves as in others, in the past or in the future. But with focus, we can reverse the trend, to strengthens our capacity to notice what is good, what we like, what is safe, as well as our gain, our strengths and our successes. With consistent practice, the inner voice of gratitude becomes stronger, louder so we enjoy and savour our lives more deeply to increase our capacity for happiness.

Studies have indicated that to positively impact and change the chemistry of the brain, we need to focus on a moment of gratitude for more than 12 seconds to a minute at the time.

A **daily practice**, to re-wire the brain, is to become aware of the ongoings of your mind and at the moment, when you become aware of undue judgements, internal criticisms or complaints, to pause, to step back, to let go and instead for 20 seconds to focus intentionally on something good in your life. The more specific you are, the more you will be able to re-live the event and positively impact your brain chemistry. Another short daily practice is to ask ourselves often throughout the day "what can I appreciate in this moment?" And then to find a simple joy to appreciate and savour for 20 seconds.

In this exercise, I invite you to either meditate or write on the following experience of gratitude. The task is to follow through with each suggestion of gratitude, notice the resistance, the ease, the joy, the appreciation, allowing yourself to be as you are and to savour each moment when you are grateful, even if at first, they are fleeting moments. If some suggestions are not relevant or difficult, that is okay, just move on to the next one. See if you can be with each suggestion of gratitude for at least 20 seconds. With consistent practice your sense of appreciation will grow.



Let's Begin with a short meditation. Making yourself comfortable, like you would make a dear friend comfortable you can close your eyes for a moment.

Being aware of your body sitting or lying down, feel yourself sinking into the chair or the floor, noticing the sensations around your hands... your feet... arriving in the present moment. Cultivating a sense of slowing down, relaxing, softening a little.

Greeting yourself with a smile, maybe placing your hand over your heart or some other soothing, comforting place to remind you of your intention to bring loving awareness and gratitude to your experience. And as you do so notice what is arising for you.... letting yourself be as you are.

Coming back to the awareness of your body... the sensations in your face, jaws, shoulders, chest, belly, legs, arms.... With the gentle invitation to soften, to relax a little more...

Now noticing the breath... the soothing breath...belly breathing... being grateful for the ease of breathing...breathing in a way that is easy for you...

Savouring the breath... breathing in the oxygen that you need to be strong... to be alive... Breathing out what you don't need anymore.

Being aware of the breath... being grateful for the breath... savouring the breath... maybe saying thank you for your lungs to breathe for you... to keep you alive... to keep you strong...

Short gratitude exercise

Simply noticing what is around you, letting yourself see the good, appreciating the simple beauty of things as they are. In this moment, just for a moment, nothing is lacking. Smiling within in simple gratitude for what is around you and your experience. Smiling within in appreciation for who you are, even if it is just for a moment. Reminding yourself of your intention to be aware of the numerous gifts in your life that are easily ignored due to the natural negative bias of our mind and our tendency to be busy.

In your mind, you can review the last two days and see if you can recall moments of:

- Joy
- Laughter
- Delight
- Beauty
- Wonder
- Awe
- Relaxation
- enjoyment
- Contentment
- Satisfaction
- Achievement
- Peace
- Love

Recalling those moments and spending time recalling the specific events involving yours senses as much as you can so you can re-live it and feel good again.

Longer gratitude exercise.

The following is a list of people, objects, experiences, that you can explore gratitude around. Some suggestions may be easier than others. If you are finding that something is not appropriate for your situation or that feeling so gratitude are difficult, move on to the next suggestion, so that the experience is relaxed and flowing, letting yourself be as you are. As best as you can staying with each moment of gratitude for at least 20 seconds.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on **something near you** that is beautiful and enjoyable but often dismissed or taken for granted. Pausing to appreciate items around you such as a plant, the sky, the comfort of the chair and so on. Turning your attention to something simple, to experience the colour, the shape, the sound, the smell. Once you have found something, delighting in the item, recognising its beauty or benefits. Taking one minute to find and stay with something to appreciate and say thank you for, to trigger a sense of appreciation and joy.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention **on a stranger,** someone you don't know that benefited your life in some ways today or recently. It could be the person who has grown the apple that you have enjoyed today, or the person that has built the house where you are, or the writer of a book that positively inspired you. Taking one minute to choose someone to appreciate and say thank you to.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on an **appliance, tool, equipment** you use in daily life. Could be a washing machine, phone, kettle, shower, something that is very useful for you. In your own way saying thank you to whoever invented and created this for you to use. Taking one minute to choose something to appreciate and be grateful.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on someone that you are **working with or someone who is helping you in some way.** It could be a colleague at work, or a helper like a doctor, carer, someone whose effort directly supports your experience of life. Taking a minute to appreciate their contribution, saying their name and thanking them as if they were in the room with you. Savouring the experience for a minute or so.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on a **loved one,** could be a person or a pet. Someone who makes you smile. Being aware of what this person or loved pet means to you, and what you appreciate about them. Considering the impact, they have had on your life, being grateful for their presence. Maybe recalling a specific good moment that you have enjoyed together, reliving this moment for at least 20 seconds. Saying their name and thanking them as if they were in the room. Thanking them for who they are and the good times you have together. Notice any sensations this brings up in the body, as you express your gratitude to them in your mind. Maybe also to promise yourself to express your gratitude to this person or your pet, your next time you see them as well.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on something that **someone did well** today. It could be someone in the government, in your local area, someone in the house with you or at work. Thinking of someone who is close to you or not so close, that maybe you have been critical of in the past, but in this moment, can recognise also what they did well. Saying thank you to them for this, , appreciating this for at least 20 seconds.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on something that **you did well** today, on a small success or achievement. Something that you enjoyed and derived a sense of accomplishment

or satisfaction. Saying thank you to yourself for what you did well, having a sense of appreciation for yourself for at least 20 seconds.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on something that **someone did for you** today that you are grateful for. Maybe remembering a smile from someone or some kind words or some assistance of some kind. Feel the appreciation and gratitude for this, saying thank you to the person as you recall the specific event as if they were in the room for at least 20 seconds.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on your **financial situation**, focussing more on what you have rather than what you have not... What can you appreciate in this moment. Can you feel some gratitude and say thank you for the situation or some aspect of the situation that you find yourself in? Saying thank you to the universe for taking care of you for at least 20 seconds.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on **a situation that is challenging either currently or in the past**. If you feel comfortable to do so, bring to mind that experience. If you are able to do this easily, that is okay, move on to the next suggestion. Can you appreciate what you learned or gained from this challenging situation? Can you find the silver lining? Maybe this struggle helped you to develop a sense of mastery or survival, or maybe there was a deeper lesson to learn to help you to become a stronger and better person in line with your values. Can you say thank you to yourself for your courage and the resourcefulness that you have shown in this situation? Taking 20 seconds or longer to truly appreciate your good intention in this situation and the silver lining. If this is too difficult that is okay, being kind with yourself, just moving on to the next suggestion.

Now I would invite you to rest your attention on **your body or health**. Is there something that you appreciate about your body or health that you are grateful for. Taking a moment to consider what is good and what is functioning well. Remembering that as long as you are breathing there is more right than wrong about you. Saying thank you for what is good in your body or health for the next 20 seconds or longer.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on **your senses** that allows yourself to be in the here and now, to appreciate what you see, hear, taste, smell, feel on your skin... our senses allow us to experience the beauty in our world, the simple moment to savour. Saying thank you to yourself what your senses allow you to experience.

Now I would invite you to rest your attention on **your mind and personality**. Is there something that you appreciate about your mind, your personality that you are grateful for. Taking a moment to consider how you obtained this positive attribute or characteristic. Being grateful for yourself to show this and for the person who inspired you or helped you to develop this positive characteristic. To recognise this positive trait in your honour the person who helped you to develop in this way. Saying thank you to this person and say thank you to yourself for expressing this positive aspect. Appreciating yourself and this other person with this quality for the next 20 seconds or longer.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on **feelings of safety**, security or a sense of being taken care of, being protected. Or maybe a sense of community or connection with others, sense of belonging, sense of friendship. Appreciating this positive feeling, and being filled with gratitude... saying thank you in your mind for feeling this way. See if you can savour this sense of safety for the next 20 seconds or longer.

Now I would like to invite you to rest your attention on **feelings of love**, kindness and comfort that you have for someone or for your pet and the good feelings that they have towards you. Savouring their good company. Appreciating this good feeling, and being filled with gratitude, saying thank you

in your mind for feeling this way. Maybe ending this gratitude exercise with offering some loving kindness wishes to your loved one and yourself: *"May you and I be at peace, May you and I be healthy, May you and I be at ease, May you and I be happy"*.

Ending

Being filled for a sense of gratitude, resting in your good intention to savour what is good. Letting yourself be as you are, being aware of being aware. Savouring the good feelings. Noticing how you feel, promising yourself to continue to practice gratitude.



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