

Gratitude

1 The Oxford Dictionary defines the word grateful as “showing an appreciation of kindness.” . . . being thankful is a feeling, and being grateful is an action. . . .Gratitude is the manifestation of love, devotion and commitment towards those who mean the most to you. It encompasses shared experiences, shared love and an understanding that the universe has conspired to keep us happy, and help us understand how connected we are to others. **Susan Rhoads**

2 Gratitude elevates your life to a higher level. **Oprah Winfrey**

3 When you appreciate the good, the good appreciates. **Amanda Gorman**

4 Love wholeheartedly, be surprised, give thanks and praise – then you will discover the fullness of your life. **Brother David Steindl-Rast**

5 Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good. **Maya Angelou**

6 Gratitude is not a passive response to something we have been given, gratitude arises from paying attention, from being awake in the presence of everything that lives within and without us. Gratitude is not necessarily something that is shown after the event, it is the deep, a-priori state of attention that shows we understand and are equal to the gifted nature of life.

--**David Whyte, Consolations**

7 It's a year now since Carol Wilson and I, sitting across the room from each other at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, heard our friend Jane describe her gratitude practice. Jane emails a colleague every day with a report of what she feels grateful for. The colleague sends Jane a gratitude message daily as well. “It's not like writing letters,” Jane said, “because we aren't obligated to respond to the contents of the other person's message. We are witnesses to each other's practice. That's all.” I glanced over at Carol,

who correctly read my look as, “Do you want to do that with me?” Carol nodded, “Yes!” We started the next day.

The first of the daily emails were easy. Carol returned to Massachusetts and could write about the pleasures of being at home. I live in California, where spring arrives early, so I could wax eloquent about crocuses and daffodils in March. The novelty of looking for things to delight in and the pleasure of being in daily communication after twenty years of a cordial relationship with only occasional times of being together kept both of us cheerful. Our emails continued to pass each other daily. Inevitably, they became weightier: “I am grateful that I have you to write to because I have had a terrible day and I am in an awful mood and I am trying to be ‘spiritual’ about it, to no avail. Now that I am writing to you about it, though, the whole thing seems less overwhelming. I feel reassured that I can manage. I am grateful for your heart as my compassionate witness.”

--Sylvia Boorstein, Lion’s Roar blog post

8 The great open secret of gratitude is that it is not dependent on external circumstance. It’s like a setting or channel that we can switch to at any moment, no matter what’s going on around us. It helps us connect to our basic right to be here, like the breath does. It’s a stance of the soul. In systems theory, each part contains the whole. Gratitude is the kernel that can flower into everything we need to know.

Thankfulness loosens the grip of the industrial growth society by contradicting its predominant message: that we are insufficient and inadequate. The forces of late capitalism continually tell us that we need more—more stuff, more money, more approval, more comfort, more entertainment. The dissatisfaction it breeds is profound. It infects people with a compulsion to acquire that delivers them into the cruel, humiliating bondage of debt. So gratitude is liberating. It is subversive. It helps us realize that we are sufficient, and that realization frees us. Elders of indigenous cultures have retained this knowledge, and we can learn from their practices.

--Joanna Macy

9 I see that I am whole, protected, and nourished by this land and all the living beings that have been here and made life worthwhile and possible for me through all of their

efforts. I see Chief Seattle, Thomas Jefferson, Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and all the others known and unknown. I see those who have worked hard to build schools, hospitals, bridges, and roads, to protect human rights, to develop science and technology, and to fight for freedom and social justice. I see myself touching my ancestors of Native American origin who have lived on this land for such a long time and know the ways to live in peace and harmony with nature, protecting the mountains, forests, animals, vegetation, and minerals of this land.

I feel the energy of this land penetrating my body and soul, supporting and accepting me. I vow to cultivate and maintain this energy and transmit it to future generations. I vow to contribute my part in transforming the violence, hatred, and delusion that still lie deep in the consciousness of this society so that future generations will have more safety, joy, and peace. I ask this land for its protection and support.

--Thich Nhat Hanh, excerpt from Five Prayers, Awakin.org

10 The Messenger, Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird -
equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young and still not half-perfect? Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.
The phoebe, the delphinium.
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are here,

Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
and these body-clothes,
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,
telling them all, over and over, how it is

that we live forever.

--from her collection, *Thirst*

For Reflection and Discussion

A Name one person or one thing that you are grateful for. Consider the many ways that you or your life are different as a result of this object of gratitude. You may want to write about or share the specifics of the gratitude you feel.

B Is gratitude an important ingredient in your own well being? Is it more of a cause or an effect of feeling good overall?

C What are the circumstances that particularly call to mind gratitude? What are the circumstances that make it hard to feel gratitude?

D Did you have good role models growing up for feeling and expressing gratitude? Do you consider yourself a good role model for feeling and expressing gratitude?

E In what ways are you grateful for All Souls? As in (A) above, see how specific and personal you can be in your answer. What are the ways you express your gratitude?

F Does your experience at All Souls help you cultivate gratitude?

--Compiled by Mary Beth Hatem for All Souls Church, Unitarian