

GRATITUDE

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

The experience of gratitude has been acknowledged as a strength or virtue in every major religion and tradition around the world for thousands of years. It is a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to being a recipient of something. The word derives from the Latin root that has to do with kindness, generosity, and giving and receiving.

There are two main types of gratitude: personal and transpersonal. Personal gratitude is directed toward another person. Transpersonal gratitude is directed toward God, a higher power, or the cosmos.

The experience of gratitude has long been associated with health benefits and now modern research substantiates it. Researchers Robert A. Emmons, PhD and Michael E. McCullough, PhD found that among other benefits, people who kept a gratitude journal, appreciations list, or other similar intervention on a weekly basis experienced the following:

- they exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives and were more optimistic than those who recorded hassles or neutral events
- were more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals and experienced less depression and stress
- enjoyed better sleep quality and duration
- experienced more high energy positive moods, alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy
- were more likely to have helped someone with a personal problem or offered emotional support
- had a greater sense of connection with others

Another outcome of their research was the distinction between gratitude (a humble receiving that requires no repayment) and indebtedness (a feeling that one has to repay a debt). Those who reported feeling indebted to others experienced more anger, lower levels of appreciation, happiness, love, and connection with others as compared to those reporting feeling grateful to others.

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## EXERCISE:

Design your own gratitude ritual or exercise that fits your needs and lifestyle. Keep a journal, diary, or list. It's been called by different names including a gratitude journal, a blessings diary, or an appreciations list. Call it whatever you'd like. Write down at least three experiences or things for which you feel thankful. Do it from one to seven times a week for at least a month. Notice what happens. Share your appreciations and gratitude with a supportive friend or family member. Daily emails, phone calls, or dinner table sharings can create a wonderfully positive glow, especially if what you are



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appreciating is the other person. If you don't have someone you're comfortable sharing with, just write it down for yourself and be sure to read it again after you've written it so you can bask in the warmth of the gratitude. Savoring gratitudes is a very effective way of amplifying the experience.

Your entries can be anything from the smallest noticing ("The way the sun peeked through the trees at sunset") to the largest events ("My daughter's wedding"). See if you can find new things to feel grateful for, but don't worry if the same items keep coming up. The important thing is the experience of thankfulness, appreciation, blessing, or gratitude.

Check out Brother David Steindl-Rast's very uplifting and informative website, <http://gratefulness.org/>.

