



## Balanced Living

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## The Gift of Gratitude

Gratitude is a gift you give yourself, no matter what it is that you are grateful for. What are you grateful for? What in your life do you appreciate? Stop for a moment and bring to mind something that you are truly grateful for, that you deeply appreciate. As you are thinking of this, notice how you feel. Notice the smile that is beginning to turn up the corners of your mouth. Notice how your body relaxes and opens up. Notice how happy you feel. How would your life be different if you experienced gratitude more of the time?

Gratitude is about having an awareness of and appreciation for the good things in your life and not taking them for granted. It is about acknowledging the kindness of others. As such, it helps us recognize that we are not solitary creatures and that others have helped and supported us along the way. Gratitude is an important character strength that is strongly correlated with happiness. It is a very positive emotion; after all it is impossible to feel bad, angry, or depressed while simultaneously feeling genuine gratitude. Gratitude *trumps* all negative emotions and replaces them with a feeling of joy and happiness. Every

time you express your feelings of gratitude, you amplify and stabilize a sense of joy in your heart.

If your gratitude is for others, your appreciation is a gift to them, especially when you let them know it. In the true spirit of a gift, appreciation is freely given without expectation of anything in return. However, your return is always a given - simply by how you feel. Gratitude feels good. Gratitude is a feeling, a focus, an experience. It is not necessarily a gift you can wrap up and put a bow on, although you can wrap up and put a bow on something that is an expression of your gratitude. Or you can write a thank you note, or simply tell someone what you appreciate about them.

Gratitude is a recognition and a deeply felt appreciation for the gifts you have been given. Gifts may be in the form of innate gifts, such as special abilities and talents - a gift of singing, a mechanical aptitude, a genius for poetry, a faculty for remembering names, an athletic talent, or the ability to see an image and create it in sculpture. What are yours? Don't be shy, we all have them.

### Newsletter Content

- The Gift of Gratitude
- Managing Holiday Stress

**Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.**





Other gifts come in all shapes and sizes and in limitless ways. They come in the form of the morning sun, of people with whom we have relationships, or who simply smile at us as we pass them on the street, the pets who love us unconditionally, electricity, running water, eyes to read this article, the breakfast you had this morning, your clients, the special vacation you will take this winter, your teachers and mentors, coaches and counselors, the nurse who placed your newborn into your arms, the great mechanic who repaired your car last week, the farmer who grew the rice you will have with tonight's dinner, and the opportunities that present themselves to you every day. Your gifts are endless, which you soon discover when you recognize and appreciate them.

Gratitude is a feeling, one of those high order feelings that brings us back home to ourselves and lines us up on all levels – physical, mental and spiritual. It gives us a sense of peace and a sense of connection with ourselves, others, a Higher Power and with all of life. It restores our faith that we are being taken care of, and that the nature of life is abundance. It opens our eyes to possibilities and to the opportunities that we are given every day, both large and small.

Gratitude is a natural medicine that enhances our physical health. The feeling of gratitude changes us on a cellular level. Joan Borysenko, world-renowned expert in mind/body medicine, said that a sense of peace and gratitude is accompanied by biochemical changes in our neuropeptides, immune system and cardiovascular system that are consistent with health and well-being.

Gratitude is the gift that keeps on giving. The more you are grateful, the more you discover you have to be grateful for. It is a universal law that we always get more of what we give our attention to. The more we focus on what we are grateful for, the more we are given to be grateful for. Gratitude attracts greater abundance into our lives.



Increased awareness of the good things and people in your life amplifies them so you come to see the world differently. Nothing has changed, just your attitude. There

are a number of ways to go about this and they are not difficult to do.

- Keep a gratitude journal. Spend a few minutes each day reflecting and writing about the good things in your life. Try to notice things you would normally take for granted.
- Each morning when you wake up, make a decision to look for things throughout the day to be grateful for, and then look-out for them.
- Say thank-you at least 10 times each day.
- Consider all the different areas of your life. List the things you are grateful for in that area. For example with work, you are grateful you only have a 20 minute commute to work.
- Step back and appreciate what you have. Such regular reflection can help prevent you taking your life for granted.
- Look for other people's good deeds and know that the world is better for that act. Express your gratitude - whether privately or publicly.
- Reflect on how your life would be if you didn't have the people in it that you do have.

By becoming a beacon of gratitude you are reaching further and accomplishing more than you ever thought possible. Being positive, being kind, being generous are all wonderful things; but none of them flow as far or as fast as the simple action of expressing heartfelt gratitude towards another living being.

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## Managing Holiday Stress

Holidays, although joyful, memorable, as well as delightful, can also be a stressful period in our lives. We seem to have so much that we need to do and want to do for other people that we sometimes forget to consider our own health needs. It is wonderful to be a loving and giving person and we should. However, it should not be at the risk of sacrificing our own health. There are several ways you can still be generous and giving without causing detrimental effects to our health.

Eat a well-balanced diet and exercise. During the holidays we are preparing for the holiday meal, cooking and cleaning our house for the expected company. There is also the shopping and wrapping all of those holiday gifts to consider while we are still doing our daily routine. This leaves us little time to eat a well-balanced meal and exercise. These are things that you must make time for in spite of all the additional holiday doings. Set aside time each day to eat right and get at least 30 minutes of exercise a few times a week. The time that it takes you to do this will be time well spent on your health and ultimately, will relieve some of the stress.

Sleep. This is another area that you should never scrimp on. When you go without needed sleep you are putting yourself at a health risk and causing yourself undue stress. Sleeplessness can make you cranky and cause you to have difficulty making decisions.

Seek out the true meaning of the holidays. It is not all about spending money and having a big celebration. Spend some time in meditation and reflect on the greater meaning behind the holiday.

Scale things down and simplify. Make things easier and less stressful on yourself by spending less. A nice gift can be purchased without spending a fortune. Shop online and avoid the crowds. There is often free shipping online during the holidays. You save time, you save gas and you save yourself the stress of shopping in a crowd and standing in long lines. If you have a large extended family that exchange gifts, encourage them to pick names so that there is only one gift to purchase during your family celebration.

Help someone in need. There are plenty of needy people in our world. Help someone else by volunteering your time or giving a gift to someone who will not be getting anything during the holidays. Donate to a charitable organization. Help serve others. You will not understand the incredible feeling of joy that you get from helping someone else until you have actually done it. It is so appreciated and an overwhelming stress reliever to be of service to someone else.

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Mike is also a Certified Life Coach and assists others to discover their true potential.

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