



THE POWER OF GRATITUDE

WHILE YOU READ, HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT WORDS/PHRASES AND ANNOTATE THE TEXT USING COMMENTS.

"There are two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle, the other is as though everything is a miracle." ~Albert Einstein

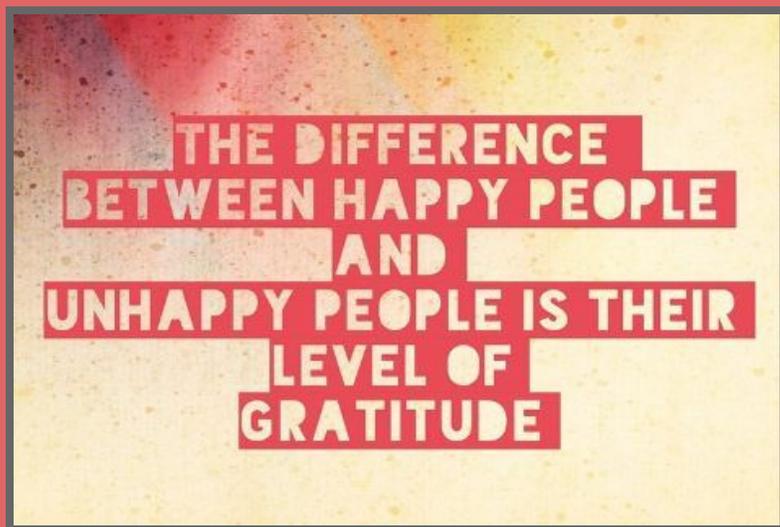
Without stopping and paying attention, we miss a lot of life's little gifts and treasures. Our focus can be dedicated towards the negative and we can easily forget all the blessings that surround us. We acclimatize to goodness - and forget it's present. Often, when we're stressed or in a bad mood, the things that annoy, anger, sadden, and depress us become highlighted in our consciousness. Media operates in a similar way, often focusing on all that is going badly without presenting a balanced perspective of all the good in the world. Of course, this does not mean that you should wear only rose-colored glasses. The point is not to be in denial about the oppression or harm, but to open up to the fuller picture which includes compassionate action, forgiveness, and a loving friendliness for people around us. To help balance and open to a wider view on life, we turn to gratitude. To practice gratitude is to intentionally focus on and appreciate the things that give meaning to life.

CULTIVATING POSITIVE EMOTIONS: GRATITUDE

Experiencing negative emotions is part of being human. At times these emotions are necessary and very useful, such as when danger is perceived. In the brain the sympathetic nervous system

is stimulated, allowing you to react quickly (fight, flight, or freeze) to a perceived threat. However, when negative emotions become chronic or are contextually inappropriate, they can lead to declining psychological well-being and stress-related illnesses. Positive, expansive feelings, such as love, compassion, and appreciation stimulate the parasympathetic ("rest and digest") nervous system, thought to complement the sympathetic system by working in opposition to it. Researchers have found that the cultivation of positive emotions not only increases joy, interest, and contentment at the time of cultivation—it also becomes a platform of experience for individuals to rely on during times of distress and mental unease. This cultivation of positive emotions can have a remarkable effect on our overall happiness and even counterbalance stress and increase recovery from stress related illness (Fredrickson, 2000). Practicing gratitude has been found to have profound effects on people. In an experimental comparison conducted at UC Davis, subjects who

were asked to keep weekly gratitude journals demonstrated higher levels of wellbeing, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives as a whole, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to those who recorded hassles or neutral life events (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). A related benefit was observed in the realm of personal goal attainment: participants who kept gratitude lists were more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals (academic, interpersonal, and health-based) over a two-month period compared to subjects in the other experimental groups.



References: Fredrickson, B.L.(2000). Cultivating Positive Emotions to Optimize Health and Well-Being. *Prevention and Treatment*, 3.

Let's practice! Take five minutes to list the things for which you are grateful. Your list can be inspired by major components of your life such as family, friends, shelter, education, etc. or subtler things such as the warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of dinner being cooked, or the smile of a stranger. Make this list of reflections current and relative to your own experience. If you get stuck or run out of "gratitudes" before the time is up, try not to get frustrated. Instead sit quietly in reflection and see if more come naturally. This is not a contest but a simple practice exercise.

BRINGING KINDNESS INTO OUR AWARENESS

Kindheartedness is easy enough to experience when things are going well, but what about when they aren't? What if you are in a bad mood or feeling stressed? With mindfulness we can actually learn to hold those contracting experiences with the same quality of openness we feel when we're content. The following are steps to help incline yourself towards kind awareness in those challenging moments:

1. **Observe:** notice how you are feeling in your body and mind.
2. **Recognize:** know what it is you are experiencing. For example: anger, discomfort, sadness, confusion, anxiety. Use anchor words.
3. **Accept:** acknowledge that this is how you are feeling in that moment without extra judgment or needing to change it. The attitude here can be that there is nothing to fix about the emotion, just be with it.
4. **Breathe:** Allow yourself to really feel that emotion for several breaths. With each breath, give it space by imagining it being held not only by you but by the whole world. The purpose of this image is to allow the feeling of contraction to loosen up. Note: we're breathing here to allow space for the emotion - not to transform it. The breath is not the focus - the emotion is.
5. **Care:** Intentionally add qualities of kindness, the way you would with a friend or a small child who came to you upset.





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Sit comfortably and gently close your eyes. Allow your breath to be natural and calm. Relax.

1

Let's begin with the toes.. Feel your toes relaxing.. Now feel your feet and let them deeply relax. Feel your ankles.. and relax. Breathe in.. breathe out and let go.

2

Then move to your lower legs, and feel them relax. Breathe in gently, breathe out and relax. Move to your upper legs. The upper legs feel relaxed. Now your whole legs are relaxed, from the top to the tips of your toes. Breathe in.. breathe out and let go.

3

Bring your attention to your seat and hips, and relax. Breathe in.. breathe out and let go.

4

Move your attention to your stomach, and relax. Breathe in.. breathe out and let go. Move up to the chest. The entire chest area is relaxing now. Continue to breathe gently.

5

Bring your attention to your lower back. Breathe calmly and relax. Move to your upper back.. relax. Your back is now completely relaxed.

6

Now draw your attention to your fingertips. Relax your fingers.. and your hands. Your lower arms are relaxed.. and your upper arms are feeling deeply relaxed. Breathe in.. breathe out and let go.

7

And now your shoulders are relaxing and melting away. Begin to relax the neck, releasing any tightness in the neck muscles. Relax and breathe calmly; let go.

8

Move your attention to your face and relax the muscles in your face. Your jaw is relaxed, your lips are relaxed, and your eyes are closed very gently and very softly. Relax.

9

Now move to your mind. Breathe in.. breathe out and let go. Allow your mind to relax deeply.

10

Move your attention to your heart. Relax into your heart, and remain there, feeling deeply relaxed in your heart¹. Stay there for a little while.

11

Now slowly bring your attention back to the present moment. Wiggle your toes, and slowly, gently open your eyes.

12

Some materials adapted

WHAT DO YOU THINK ?
WHAT INFORMATION FROM THE VIDEO IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE OF MINDFULNESS?



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