

# Gratitude

“We were made to enjoy music, to enjoy beautiful sunsets, to enjoy looking at the billows of the sea and to be thrilled with a rose that is bedecked with dew... Human beings are actually created for the transcendent, for the sublime, for the beautiful, for the truthful... and all of us are given the task of trying to make this world a little more hospitable to these beautiful things.”

~Desmond Tutu



Impala saying “thank you” to the ox-pecker for keeping it free of ticks!

Gratitude is a spiritual practice of the highest order.

As with every other quality of the soul we start off as children saying “thank you” and expressing gratitude because to not do so will be punished. Some of the first words we learn to say are “please” and “thank you.” And if you do not learn to say these words, there is a withholding of whatever is being offered, or shaming in one way or another. You learn to say “thank you” out of guilt, shame and fear and in order to get something you need or want. eg. “If you do not write “thank-you” letters to Granny, you won’t get anything from her again!” If you don’t want to eat your food you are told, “You should be grateful. There are other children in the world that have nothing to eat.” If you whine and complain, you are told to “count your blessings.”

This is all good socialization and provides the foundation for paying attention to the many blessings of your life. Gradually if you pay attention and mature, you start feeling a sense of gratitude for the “good things,” in your life instead of just taking them for granted and having a sense of entitlement. And, if you are really lucky you encounter real deprivation and poverty in the world, as the Buddha did the first time he stepped out of his privileged, protected, palace life. Now you experience first hand how blessed you are in comparison to others and the question naturally arises, “Why is there suffering in the world?” This marks the start of the spiritual journey. Questions start arising out of your own suffering or witnessing the hardships of others. Note that shame i.e. suffering, serves a very useful function in developing a “good/nice/

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considerate personality,” instead of a “selfish, entitled, nasty, ego.” And your ego/personality is the foundation of all future spiritual growth. If you do not have a well developed personality rooted in fear and shame, you have no springboard for future development. As Archbishop Tutu said, “Dear Child of God, I am sorry to say that suffering is not optional.”

However, whether you have good manners or not, know your “p’s and q’s”, or not, this is still not true gratitude.

True gratitude is born in the awakened heart, in a fully alive human being, one that can experience awe and wonder, joy and excitement and see the world afresh with new eyes every moment. It is the realization of life as a precious and amazing gift.

The prerequisite for awakening to the beauty of your life, is letting go of the idea that you are either “good” or “bad” and of the shame and guilt, pride and hubris that taught you good manners in the first place.

Does this mean you stop having good manners? No. It means you have good manners that are authentic to your truest state of being. It is gratitude that flows from a heart of love and an understanding of the improbability of your existence and experience of this world. It comes from the moment to moment recognition of the miracles of beauty in creation, including yourself.

This is the final step in gratitude: the dawning awareness that everything in your life has brought you to this moment of awakening. All the shame, the guilt, the fear, the suffering, the false beliefs, the miserable and sad experiences, your enemies - you have used all of it, every step of the journey, to bring you to this moment of awakening, and your heart bursts open with hymns of thanksgiving and praise.

You move from 1) *blissful unawareness* and acceptance of the bounty of your life without any sense of gratitude, to 2) expressing gratitude to others out of unaware feelings of fear of shame, and knowing that to have good manners brings good results, to having some sense of gratitude for the “good” things in your life, to 4) a place of freedom from fear and shame through doing the great work of becoming aware and arriving at a place of *blissful awareness* and acceptance of the bounty of your life. You then recognize how *everything*, yes, everything, has been nothing but gift, freely given from the Heart of Love. And you recognize that ego was the vehicle that brings you from blissful unawareness to blissful awareness. And you are grateful for your suffering and for your enemies and your parents that shamed you and the culture that hurt you. Both Mandela and Tutu are men that have completed this four part harmony of life and they express gratitude unendingly.

On this trip we are asking you to participate in this practice by being as fully aware of your fellow pilgrims as you can be. Notice how their lives, words, and actions, are all contributing to your awakening.

This means you are going to have to exert an effort in getting to know everyone, participate fully, and be aware of what is alive in you in every moment. What feeling and need arises in you? How are your needs met/or not met by others (both are a gift - having your needs met and not

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having your needs met are both gifts). Make sure you understand the difference between your wants (tactics to try to get a need met) and a real universal human need. Eg. It is a universal human *need* to be loved. How we demand others behave to prove they love us is a *want and control issue*.

By the end of the trip we are going to be exchanging gratitude cards to one another saying “thank you” as genuinely as you are able to do, to each and every person on the trip.

This is a big task. And so you are being asked to think about it now. Start preparing to interact with one another by noticing the gifts they bring to your life. To this end I am enclosing a snippet of a teaching by Marshall Rosenberg on how to express and receive gratitude. If you really study this, you will find that this is a much harder task than it seems at first because it demands awareness.

Do not leave this to the last minute. You each have 27 cards to write. So start now by being vigilant of what the others on this trip bring to your life and your own evolutionary process. You may use whatever you like and be as creative as you like in doing this.

What needs do others meet for you? How does it make you feel? Make notes in your journal. And most importantly notice what comes up in you. Is this a joyful practice? Is this a chore and are you doing it out of duty and fear? Can you feel gratitude in your heart? Are you irritated? Do you want to comply or rebel? What is your knee-jerk reaction? What is your self talk? What are your fears doing this? Your inner response is the way to see where you are in the journey and what the correct practice is to apply to your own condition.

And I will end on a note of gratitude to each of you. My heart sings as I witness the way in which each of you is engaging the material and process of pilgrimage into the core of your own being. I see you facing your fears, working with your own shadow and doing the practices. I feel hope when I see you relating to yourselves and each other with awareness and care. This gratifies my need to teach and be of service. I am excited, feel joy and a tremendous sense of anticipation. Thank you all,

With love and blessings,

Lyndall

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.” ~ Desmond Tutu

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GRATITUDE

Within the characters for thanks  
and feelings are embedded the  
symbols for heart and speech.  
From the heart, with feeling,  
I express my gratitude.