



TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

Gratitude



Introduction to the Theme

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Annie Dillard writes, "We wake, if we wake at all, to mystery, rumors of death, beauty, violence.... 'Seem like we're just set down here,' a woman said to me recently, 'and don't nobody know why.' ... Some unwonted, taught pride diverts us from our original intent, which is to explore the neighborhood, view the landscape, to discover where it is that we have been so startlingly set down, even if we can't learn why."

Once our children, once we begin to explore the neighborhood, pay attention to the landscape, become the things that we encounter, whether it is the lilacs, the cat asleep on our lap that we are

petting, or a person who is in want or pain, we can begin to see the world in new ways.

If we continue exploring, with an open mind and an open heart; if we continue exploring we may begin to stop taking the world and all of the incredible gifts that bless our lives for granted, feeling instead a profound gratitude. This is what happened to me as a child, not because I intended or expected it. Life simply surprised me while I was doing something else. The something else was going Trick or Treating on Halloween night for the first time with the older children who lived on my street. All I wanted was the freedom that this symbolized, and lots of candy. But, for whatever reason, I looked up into the nighttime sky, I looked up through the leafless branches of trees, I looked up and saw ten thousand points of starlight, and felt an overwhelming and profound sense of gratitude for being alive, for having eyes to see, for witness-

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Gratitude & Letting Your Life Speak

What languages do you speak? One of the more important human languages is that of gratitude. If we listen carefully to our life, we hear its murmurs. It speaks, sings, dances and more to gain our attention, and invite us to respond to all of the gifts that bless our lives. One of the things that impairs our ability to notice is a sense of entitlement, the belief that all that comes to us is our due. This attitude means that we take too much, if not everything, for granted. As Paul Gibbons observes, "Feeling entitled is the opposite of feeling grateful. Gratitude opens the heart, entitlement closes it." What is life with a closed heart? In the end, it is not a life worth living. The truth is, as the poet Sara Teasdale wrote, "life has loveliness to sell," but it can only be purchased with gratitude.

Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>

Wisdom Story

A Whale's Gratitude

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland



How could this have happened, she wondered? She had made this trip more than 20 times, the annual migration in late fall south from Alaska's Bering Sea along the west coast as she headed to Baja, California and the Sea of Cortez where she would spend the winter. The trip was 3,000 miles and it took several months to complete. Somehow she had become separated from her pod, the seven humpback whales that she had been traveling with. They had all reached the Farallon Islands, which were 30 miles due west of the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco, to feed, but now she was alone and in danger.

It was a Sunday in early December and it happened so suddenly. She swam too close to one of the islands and caught herself in a nylon rope attached to a 90-pound crab-pot that had been placed to catch Dungeness crabs. She dove to try to dislodge it, but found herself caught in a second rope, and then a third. Thrashing in fear, she soon found herself in a spider-web of 20 ropes that pulled her down.

Each time she surfaced, she could hear the barking of the sea lions that were gathered on the rocks of the nearest is-

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Let Your Life Speak

(Continued from page 1) Wisdom Story

land. Perhaps they understood what was happening to her, but they were powerless to do anything. But someone else saw what was happening to her.

A crab fisherman spotted her as she surfaced and cleared her blowhole to gasp for air. He was just east of the Farallon Islands and radioed for help. His call was relayed to the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito. A team of divers was assembled and they sailed as fast as possible to reach her, but it took a long six hours.

When she surfaced again, the divers realized that the only way to save her was to dive into the water and cut the ropes by hand with special curved knives. It was dangerous, because she was thrashing around so much. One flip of her massive tail could crush a diver. Four divers went into the water and began cutting the ropes to free her. It was very hard work, and took more than an hour.

When the last rope was released and she was finally free, the divers expected that she would immediately swim to deeper water. But, to their surprise, that is not what happened. Instead, she began swimming around in circles. The whale swam to one diver and nuzzled him, and then swam to the next diver and did the same. The divers believed then and still believe that she was thanking them. This gesture of gratitude was both unexpected and moving. One diver, James Moskito, who had been first into the water, and was the one who cut the rope in her mouth, said, "It seemed kind of affectionate, like a dog that's happy to see you. I never felt threatened. It was an amazing, unbelievable experience." In fact, the experience of gratitude is often amazing.



Let Us Give Thanks

Rev. Max Coots

Let us give thanks for a bounty of people. For children who are our second planting, and though they grow like weeds and the wind too soon blows them away, may they forgive us our cultivation and remember fondly where their roots are.

Let us give thanks;

For generous friends...with hearts as big as hubbards* and smiles as bright as their blossoms;

For feisty friends, as tart as apples;

For continuous friends, who, like scalions and cucumbers, keep reminding us that we've had them;

For crotchety friends, as sour as rhubarb and as indestructible;

For handsome friends, who are as gorgeous as eggplants and as elegant as a row of corn, and the others, as plain as potatoes and so good for you;

For funny friends, who are as silly as Brussels sprouts and as amusing as Jerusalem artichokes;

And serious friends, as complex as cauliflowers and as intricate as onions.

For friends as unpretentious as cabbages, as subtle as summer squash, as persistent as parsley, as delightful as dill, as endless as zucchini and who, like parsnips, can be counted on to see you through the winter;

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening-time, and young friends coming on as fast as radishes;

For loving friends, who wind around us like tendrils and hold us, despite our blights, wilts, and witherings;

And finally, for those friends now gone, like gardens past that have been harvested, but who fed us in their times that we might have life thereafter.

For all these, we give thanks.

*(hubbards refer to hubbard squash., a winter squash grown in New England since the 1830s.)

Source: <https://amyfreedman.net/2014/11/27/favorite-thanksgiving-poem/>

The Anatomy of Gratitude

David Steindl-Rast

The reason ...I use the words "gratitude," ..."gratefulness," and "thanksgiving" in the way ...I use them [is because] we really need different terms for our experience. ...Moments [of] ...gratitude well up in our hearts..., first, ...filling up within us, filling [us] with joy,.... And then ...comes ...a point where the heart overflows, and we sing, and we thank somebody; and for that, I like a different term.... I call that "thanksgiving." And the two of them are two aspects ...of the process that is gratitude....

...This idea of a vessel that is still inarticulate until it overflows... is also very helpful in another way. It's like the bowl of a fountain when it fills up.... It's very quiet and still. ...When it overflows, it starts to make noise, ...it sparkles, and it ripples down. And that is ...when the joy ...is articulate.

...For many people in our culture, the heart fills up with joy, with gratefulness, and just at the moment when it wants to overflow, and really, [when] the joy comes ... [marketing] comes in and says, "No, no, there's a better model, and there's a newer model, and your neighbor has a bigger one." And so instead of overflowing, we [work to] make the bowl bigger and bigger and bigger, and it never overflows. It never gives us this joy.

...People ask, "Well, how shall we practice this gratefulness?" And there is a very simple kind of methodology....: Stop, look, go.

...When you are in practice, a split second is enough — "stop." And then you look: What is ...the unique opportunity this moment gives? And that is where this beholding comes in. And if we really see what the opportunity is, we must, ...not stop there, but we must do something with it: Go. Avail yourself of that opportunity.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/programs/david-steindl-rast-anatomy-of-gratitude-dec2017/>



Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "If the only prayer you said was thank you that would be enough."
Meister Eckhart



Day 2: "When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude."
Elie Wiesel

Day 3: "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."
Melody Beattie

Day 4: "Some people grumble that roses have thorns; I am grateful that thorns have roses."
Alphonse Karr

Day 5: "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others."
Marcus Tullius Cicero

Day 6: "Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude."
Denis Waitley

Day 7: "We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures."
Thornton Wilder

Day 8: "Darkness deserves gratitude. It is the alleluia point at which we learn to understand that all growth does not take place in the sunlight."
Joan Chittister

Day 9: "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."
William Arthur Ward

Day 10: "We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude."
Cynthia Ozick

Day 11: "Gratitude is the ability to experience life as a gift. It liberates us from the prison of self-preoccupation."
John Ortberg

Day 12: "The root of joy is gratefulness.... It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful."
David Steindl-Rast

Day 13: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart."
Jean Baptiste Massieu

Day 14: "Gratitude keeps your heart open. When you give with an open heart, you get the profound gift of humility."
Cami Walker

Day 15: "The highest tribute to the dead is not grief but gratitude."
Thornton Wilder



Day 16: "I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual... O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment."
Henry David Thoreau

Day 17: "Gratitude is the first sign of a thinking, rational creature."
Solanus Casey

Day 18: "Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world."
John Milton

Day 19: "Some of my most precious moments of insight have been those in which I have seen clearly that gratitude is the only possible response."
Sylvia Boorstein

Day 20: "My gratitude extends beyond the limits of my capacity to express it."
Iain Banks

Day 21: "The Pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No Americans have been more impoverished than these who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving."
H.U. Westermayer

Day 22: "You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink."
G.K. Chesterton

Day 23: "Two kinds of gratitude: The sudden kind we feel for what we take; the larger kind we feel for what we give."
Edwin Arlington Robinson

Day 24: "Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all."
William Faulkner

Day 25: "A person however learned and qualified in ...life's work in whom gratitude is absent, is devoid of that beauty of character which makes personality fragrant."
Hazrat Inayat Khan

Day 26: "'Thank you' is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding."
Alice Walker

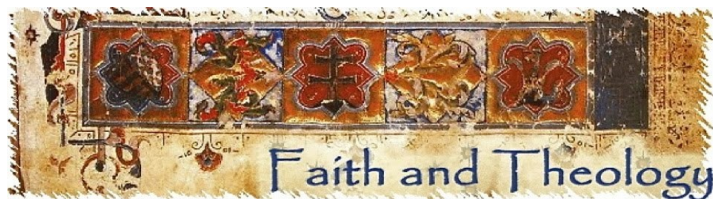
Day 27: "The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings."
Eric Hoffer

Day 28: "Gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart and not in the mind."
Lionel Hampton

Day 29: "We're a nation hungry for more joy: Because we're starving from a lack of gratitude."
Brené Brown

Day 30: "Gratitude is the greatest prayer. Thank you is the greatest mantra."
Paramahansa Nityananda

Day 31: "The most fortunate are those who have a wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder and even ecstasy."
Abraham Maslow



gratitude that obligates us to create a future that justifies an increasing sense of gratitude from the human family as a

Gratitude: The Heart of Faith

Rev. Galen Guengerich

...In my view, religion is constituted by two distinct but related impulses: a sense of awe and a sense of obligation. The feeling of awe emerges from our experience of the grandeur of life and the mystery of the divine. This feeling becomes religious when a sense of obligation lays claim to us, and we feel a duty to the larger life that we share. In theological terms, religion begins as transcendence, which is the part about God, and then leads to discipleship, which is the part about the discipline of faith.

I realize the idea of faith as a discipline may ...sound like heresy to many Unitarian Universalists. Unless our faith is mere intellectual affectation, however, the defining element of our faith must be a daily practice of some kind. What kind of practice? For Jews, the defining discipline is obedience: To be a faithful Jew is to obey the commands of God. For Christians, the defining discipline is love: To be a faithful Christian is to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. For Muslims, the defining discipline is submission: To be a faithful Muslim is to submit to the will of Allah.

And what of us? What should be our defining religious discipline? While obedience, love, and even submission each play a vital role in the life of faith, my current conviction is that our defining discipline should be gratitude. In the same way that Judaism is defined by obedience, Christianity by love, and Islam by submission, I believe that Unitarian Universalism should be defined by gratitude.

Why gratitude? Two dimensions of gratitude make it fitting as our defining religious practice. One has to do with a discipline of gratitude, and the other has to do with an ethic of gratitude. The discipline of gratitude reminds us how utterly dependent we are on the people and world around us for everything that matters. From this flows an ethic of

whole. The ethic of gratitude demands that we nurture the world that nurtures us in return. It is our duty to foster the kind of environment that we want to take in, and therefore become.

The two forms gratitude takes in our lives (a discipline and an ethic) are natural outcomes of the two elements of religious experience (awe and obligation). The experience of awe leads to the discipline of gratitude, and the experience of obligation leads to an ethic of gratitude.

There are many potential defining virtues from which to choose. Why gratitude? It has to do with the role of religion and the nature of the universe. The role of religion, in my view, is to help us find our place as human beings within this universe we call home. You may recall that the word religion does not mean to liberate or set free, but rather to bind together. Religion unites the purpose of our lives as human beings with the purpose that animates the universe. Religion unites the meaning of our lives as human beings with the meaning that pervades the universe. Religion unites the spirit of humanity with the spirit that keeps the stars shining, the planets spinning, and the flowers blooming in springtime. I believe that gratitude is the appropriate religious response to the nature of the universe.



...If the first principle of all existence is utter dependence, then the deadliest of all sins is the effort to negate or disregard that principle through the myth of self-sufficiency. In this state of sin, salvation comes through gratitude. It is the means by which we remember both our identity

and our duty.

Unlike freedom, gratitude is a uniquely religious virtue. Why is this so? A sense of awe and a sense of obligation, religion's basic impulses, are both experiences of transcendence, of being part of something much larger than ourselves.

The feeling of awe emerges from experiences of the grandeur of life and the mystery of the divine. We happen upon a sense of inexpressible exhilaration at being alive and a sense of utter dependence upon sources of being beyond ourselves. This sense of awe and dependence should engender in us a discipline of gratitude, which constantly acknowledges that our present experience depends upon the sources that make it possible. The feeling of obligation lays claim to us when we sense our duty to the larger life we share. As we glimpse our dependence upon other people and things, we also glimpse our duty to them. This sense of obligation leads to an ethic of gratitude, which takes our experience of transcendence in the present and works for a future in which all relationships among humans, as well as between humans and the physical world, are fair, constructive, and beautiful.

Put another way, the discipline of gratitude connects the present with the past, while the ethic of gratitude connects the present with the future just as Whitehead and his successors in the process theology movement described God both as the refuge of the past and as the hope of the future.

Disciplines teach us who we are. They remind us of commitments we have made and show us the path to walk. When Muslims pray five times each day facing Mecca, they remember who they are as people of faith. When I say "I love you" to my wife and daughter when we go our separate ways in the morning and when we retire at night, I remind myself that I am, first and foremost, a husband and father.

In fact, the word *discipline* comes from an ancient Latin word that means teaching or instruction, as in the discipline of mathematics or philosophy. The Latin root of the word *discipline* means pupil,

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What Parents Neglect to Teach about Gratitude

Andrea Hussong

...Being grateful means much more than just saying thank you. Not only is the experience and expression of gratitude broader than thanking others but it requires children to use a set of complex socio-emotional skills. ...Gratitude in children involves perspective taking and emotional knowledge, skills that children begin to develop more quickly around ages three to five.

In the Raising Grateful Children (<http://hussong.web.unc.edu/drrl/rgc/>) project ..., we've come to think about gratitude as an experience that has four parts:

- ◆ What we **NOTICE** in our lives for which we can be grateful.
- ◆ How we **THINK** about why we have been given those things.
- ◆ How we **FEEL** about the things we have been given.
- ◆ What we **DO** to express appreciation in turn.

Older children ...are more likely to spontaneously engage in all four parts of gratitude, but younger children may only engage in some of these ...when prompted. Children may show more gratitude as they gain cognitive skills, collect practice with those skills, and begin to connect the NOTICE-THINK-FEEL parts of experiencing gratitude with the DO part of expressing gratitude.



This model emphasizes that gratitude is about how we receive things in the world as well as how we give to others. Indeed, when it comes to children, our team expects that helping them learn to

deeply receive things in their lives will help engender genuine experiences of gratitude. These experiences, in turn, may motivate the appreciative behaviors that parents want to see in their children.

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_parents_neglect_to_teach_about_gratitude

Questions That Foster Gratitude

Andrea Hussong

...There are opportunities for fostering gratitude in children.... Finding ways to help children more deeply notice what they have received is an important place to start.

How can parents do that? By asking [children] questions [about] ...NOTICE-THINK-FEEL-DO...[like the following].

NOTICE: What have you been given or what do you already have in your life for which you are grateful? Are there gifts behind the material gifts for which you are grateful, like someone thinking about you or caring about you enough to give you the gift?

THINK: Why do you think you received this gift? Do you think you owe the giver something in return? Do you think you earned the gift because of something you did...? Do you think the gift was something the giver had to give you? ...

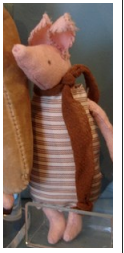
FEEL: Does it make you feel happy to get this gift? What does that feel like inside? What about the gift makes you feel happy? ...

DO: Is there a way you want to show how you feel about this gift? Does the feeling you have about this gift make you want to share that feeling by giving something to someone else? Prompting children after experiences of gratitude in order to motivate acts of gratitude, whether they be acts of appreciation or paying it forward, may help children connect their experiences and actions in the world. ...

We think that these types of questions may help children to more deeply receive gifts from others or notice what they already have in the world.

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_parents_neglect_to_teach_about_gratitude

Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude. A.A. Milne



Family Activity: Gratitude Circle

This can become an ongoing activity before a meal. Each person seated around the table is invited to share one thing for which they are grateful. It can be for that day, for the last week, or just in general. Sometimes by going around a second time, family members can play off or build on what others have shared. The point is that there is often much to be grateful for if we are paying attention.

Family Activity:

Thirty Days of Gratitude

November is a good time to count our blessings as we approach Thanksgiving Day. In a kind of reverse advent calendar, invite your children to create small drawings for each day and post them in order by date. At the end, take a picture of the 30 pieces of art to remember their gratitude collage. For more ideas about observing 30 days of gratitude, go to the website <https://www.livewellplaytogether.com/30-days-gratitude/>



I am saying thank you. Thank you is my practice.

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**
ing the incredible beauty and mystery of the world, which always exceeds any imagining.

Linguistic analysis suggests that the use of the word gratitude has declined dramatically since 1800, which is troubling.

Unitarian Universalist minister Ralph Helverson wrote, "We have religion when we stop deluding ourselves that we are self-sufficient, self-sustaining, or self-derived." It would be many years before I could understand his words, but I experienced their reality in the core of my being on that Halloween night so long ago. He also wrote, "We have religion when we have an abiding gratitude for all that we have received."

The hymn *Cuando El Pobre* (*When the Poor Ones*) was written in 1971 by A. Oliver and Miguel Manzano. It is a meditation on Matthew 25: 31-46.

When the poor ones, who have nothing, still are giving. We tend to think that gratitude and generosity exist in proportion to the material possessions that one has. They do not. Gratitude is an attitude of the heart and generosity can be as simple as an embrace or paying attention to another. M. Scott Peck said that we love others by paying attention to them.

When the thirsty pass the cup, water to share. In the 23rd Psalm, David stated that his "cup runneth over." When you are thirsty and can still pass the cup to share water, then your life runneth over with intangibles that are beyond measure, intangibles that no cup can measure or contain.

When the wounded offer others strength and healing. To have been wounded by life is to know just how precious life truly is for we cannot offer strength and healing to others if we have not experienced them our self. We give what we know and who we are out of a profound sense of gratitude.

We see God, here by our side, walking our way. It does not matter if you believe in God or do not, what matters is whom

you walk with and what you offer others of your heart and your hand.

This is the way of gratitude. It is a



way of life that is deep and wide, a way that daily reminds us of our dependence and interdependence, a way that can become a spiritual practice grounded in prayer, meditation, or contemplation.

There are different types of prayer. One classification proposes four categories: gratitude, intercession (or petition), awe, and remorse; or as a more descriptive approach reminds us: Thanks! Gimme! Wow! and Oops!

The 14th century Dominican monk and mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, "If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is 'thank you,' that will be enough." By this he meant that the most important prayer is not one of petition in which we ask for something for our self or another, but a prayer of gratitude. It could be a prayer of gratitude to God, but it also could be a prayer of gratitude for your spouse or partner, for your child, for your friends, for your life, or for the earth itself. Indeed, when we begin counting our blessings, the sources are many and the gratitude is profound.

But there is more. The point is not simply a prayer to or a prayer for someone or something. As Unitarian Universalist Minister Raymond Baughn wrote, "Giving thanks has nothing to do with who or what produced the gift. It is ra-

ther a way of perceiving our life. Even in the midst of hurt and disappointment, when we see ourselves in the universe that gave us life and touches us with love, we praise."

His words are important. They take us back to the poor ones, the thirsty, and the wounded who can still give, who can still praise, who can still experience life as a gift, who can still respond with gratitude. It is easy to respond with gratitude when life is filled to overflowing. It is more challenging to experience gratitude when we are in despair, or questioning, or experiencing sorrow or suffering or want. There are unfinished, unhealed, and unfulfilled parts of our lives, just as the world is too often dominated by war, oppression, and injustice. To experience

gratitude, given these realities, is to place our life in a much larger framework that recognizes our individual and collective existence as a profound, unimaginable, and unrepeatably gift.

Gratitude invites a spiritual practice in which daily we express our thanksgiving to those around us, those who inhabit the circles of care, connection, and commitment that ripple out from the center of our being. As Thoreau said, "My thanksgiving is perpetual."

Before that Halloween night, I was clueless about gratitude, although, despite a difficult childhood, I had ample reasons to be grateful. After that night, after experiencing gratitude, I have had an abiding gratitude for all that I have received. Occasionally, I forget and take something for granted, only to have life remind me again that gratitude is the necessary and proper response, that gratitude is an obligation.

Annie Dillard once said, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." How do you want to spend your life? My answer is the same as that of Unitarian Universalist songwriter Judy Fjell who sings, "I am saying thank you. I am saying thank you. I am saying thank you. Thank you is my practice."

Why Gratitude Is Good

Robert Emmons



...Gratitude.... is an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received. This doesn't mean that life is perfect; it doesn't ignore complaints, burdens, and hassles. But when we look at life as a whole, gratitude encourages us to identify...goodness in our life.

...Gratitude is [also] figuring out where that goodness comes from. We recognize the sources of this goodness as being outside of ourselves. ... True gratitude involves a humble dependence on others....

What good is gratitude?

1. Gratitude allows us to celebrate the present. ...Gratitude makes us appreciate the value of something, and when we appreciate the value of something, we extract more benefits from it; we're less likely to take it for granted. In effect, I think gratitude allows us to participate more in life. ...

2. Gratitude blocks toxic, negative emotions, such as envy, resentment, regret—emotions that can destroy our happiness. ...You cannot feel envious and grateful at the same time. They're incompatible feelings. ...

3. Grateful people are more stress resistant. There's a number of studies showing that in the face of serious trauma, adversity, and suffering, if people have a grateful disposition, they'll recover more quickly. ...

4. Grateful people have a higher sense of self-worth. ...When you're grateful, you have the sense that someone else is looking out for you—someone else has provided for your well-being, or you notice a network of relationships ...of people who are responsible for helping you get to where you are right now.

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good

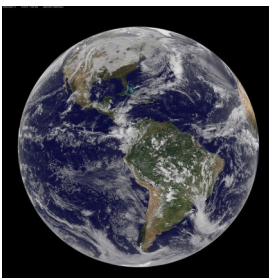
Gratitude

Oliver Sacks

Oliver Sacks, neurologist, naturalist, historian of science, and prolific author, was diagnosed with cancer in January 2015 and died eight months later at the age of 81. In the interval, he attended to life deeply. This included writing four essays that were collected in the book, *Gratitude*, which was published a few months after his death. Following are two excerpts.

"Over the last few days, I have been able to see my life as from a great altitude, as a sort of landscape, and with a deepening sense of the connection of all its parts. This does not mean I am finished with life. On the contrary, I feel intensely alive, and I want and hope in the time that remains to deepen my friendships, to say farewell to those I love, to write more, to travel if I have the strength, to achieve new levels of understanding and insight." ...

"There will be no one like us when we are gone, but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate—the genetic and neural fate—of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death. I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and traveled and thought and written. I have had an intercourse with the world, the special intercourse of writers and readers. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure."



Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/47201204-gratitude>

Gratitude and Mindfulness

Jack Kornfield

In certain [Buddhist] temples..., there's ...a prayer ...: "May I be given the appropriate difficulties so that my heart can truly open with compassion." Imagine asking for that.

If we see the world as sacred, ...then gratitude follows immediately and naturally. We've been given the extraordinary privilege of incarnating as human beings [which,] ...entails the 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows, as it says in the *Tao Te Ching*—but with it we have the privilege of the lavender color at sunset, the taste of a tangerine in our mouth, and the almost unbearable beauty of life around us, along with its troubles. It keeps recreating itself. We can either be lost in a smaller state of consciousness—what in Buddhist psychology is called the "body of fear," which brings suffering to us and to others—or we can bring the quality of love and appreciation, which I would call gratitude, to life. ... The poet Pablo Neruda writes, "You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the spring." Life keeps ...presenting us with miracles every day.



...My meditation master in ... Thailand ...would ask..., "Where have you learned more compassion? Where have you learned more? Where has your heart grown wiser—in just having good times, or going through difficulties?" There's a Buddhist-oriented therapy in Japan called Naikan Therapy, and one part of that training is to review your life and begin to remember all the things you have gratitude towards, even the things that were difficult and taught you lessons.

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/jack_kornfield_on_gratitude_and_mindfulness

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Gratitude

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of *Explorations* and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “The world has enough beautiful mountains and meadows, spectacular skies and serene lakes. It has enough lush forests, flowered fields and sandy beaches. It has plenty of stars and the promise of a new sunrise and sunset every day. What the world needs more of are people to appreciate and enjoy it.” *Michael Josephson*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)
(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “I do not believe that we can put into anyone ideas which are not in him [or her] already. As a rule there is in everyone all sorts of good ideas, ready like tinder. But much of this tinder catches fire, or catches it successfully, only when it meets some flame or spark from the outside, from some other person. Often, too, our own light goes

out, and is rekindled by some experience we go through with [another].... Thus we have each of us ...[reason] to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. If we had before us those who have thus been a blessing to us, and could tell them how it came about, they would be amazed to learn what passed over from their life to ours.” *Albert Schweitzer*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Do you regard life as a gift? Why or why not? How do you respond if you do consider life to be a gift?
2. What in your life—people, events, places, objects, etc.—do you regard as gifts? What obligation, if any, do these evoke in you?
3. What value do you place on the experience of gratitude? On the expression of gratitude?
4. What meaning or value do you place on the gratitude extended to you by others?
5. What would a spiritual practice of gratitude look like? Is it a practice that calls to you? Why or why not?
6. Where are the deep places of gratitude in your life?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Why Gratitude?

(Continued from page 4) **Theology & Faith**

which is also the root of the word *disciple*. When Jesus called the twelve who became his disciples, he said to each in turn, “Come, follow me.” As they followed Jesus, they became pupils of a new way of understanding themselves and their lives. They found a new path to walk. In a similar way, I believe we as Unitarian Universalists are called to be disciples of gratitude, to learn gratitude as a daily practice. I call this path the discipline of gratitude.

...The discipline of gratitude is about knowing how much we have been given and acknowledging the scope of our dependence. It’s about saying “thank you” to the people we love, to the world we enjoy, to the universe we inhabit, and to the God who holds us all in a divine embrace.

Source: Excerpt, full text at <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/a-theology-gratitude>

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