

Personal Development

A Mindful Awareness Experience to “Get Your Gratitude on”

Introduction

Can you think of at least one time during the past year you gathered around a table in someone’s kitchen, or sat in someone’s backyard, or relaxed in a chair and expressed something you were *grateful* for? It might have been the weather. The smell of spring. The sight of blooming flowers. Summer rain. Fall colors. The first snow. A child’s first steps. Some people offer gratitude before or after a meal. Some offer gratitude after a success such as being on the honor roll, or getting a promotion or a pay raise. It could be acknowledging the blessings of physical and mental health. It could be about one’s recovery or remission.

Gratitude is way of saying, “Thanks” and meaning it.

It sounds simple.

And, it is.

Often, we are touched and moved by being grateful. It just feels good. Gratitude gives us way to break out of our habitual ways of looking at things. It gives us a chance to speak from our whole being -our heads, bodies, feelings, and spirit- and an opportunity to express ourselves more fully. Speaking in this way really matters for others and really matters for our own health and well-being. This is why we turn today to the power of Gratitude Practice.

Practice

Find a comfortable posture. This could be lying down, sitting or even walking. See if it is possible to let your body to relax right now—just 5% more. This might mean letting your jaw soften, letting your shoulders release, or letting your abdomen relax. Again, only 5%.

Next, go ahead and take three deep, cleansing breaths.

To begin, on an inhale, breathing deeply into the abdomen. It might feel like a small balloon is inflating in there. If it is comfortable, hold the breath for a few seconds and then exhale, allowing the outbreath to be longer than the inbreath. (Repeat 2 more times)

Taking this moment and considering one thing you are grateful for.

(Pause)

It might be the air you're breathing. The clothes on your back. Today's weather, maybe. It might be family. Neighbors. Friends. Your partner or spouse. Your pet(s). People you served with in the military. Someone at the VA. People from your religious community. Just one thing you are grateful for. Or maybe it is more than one thing.

The point is to consider what you are grateful for—as best as you can.

(Pause)

Now, taking a moment to really **see** what you are grateful for. Can you picture it in as much detail as possible?

Seeing what you are grateful for. It might be a picture of your grandson or granddaughter. It might be a letter from a friend.

(Pause)

Taking a moment to **hear** what you are grateful for. Does it have sound? Can you hear it in as much detail as possible?

It might be sound of the wind in some pine trees. The sound of a person's voice.

(Pause)

And, taking a moment to **feel** what you are grateful for. Can you feel it as best as you are able?

Where do you feel this in your body? Do you feel this in your chest? Your face?

If there are no feelings, this is totally okay. Let your experience be just as it is.

(Pause)

Next, let's take this one step further.

What are others grateful for about you? Let's repeat this question. (*Say slowly*) What are others grateful for about you? What might friends, partners, spouses, neighbors, providers, teachers, peers say makes them grateful for you?

For example, your high school buddy might say you are "funny" and have "a good sense of humor." Someone you served with may comment about your ability to complete a mission. That you were "dependable." Allow your mind to connect with one thing someone has told you at some point in your life about what they were grateful for about you.

(Pause)

Where do you feel this in your body?

How does this feel, if there are any feelings? And, if there are no feelings, this is totally okay. We are just noticing. As best as you are able, let your experience be just as it is.

(Pause)

One more time, see if it is possible to your body to relax right now—just another 5% more. This might mean inviting your jaw to soften, your shoulders to release, or your abdomen to relax. Again, only 5%.

Next, take three deep, cleansing breaths.

Finally, on an inhale, breathe deeply again into the abdomen. It might resemble or feel like a small balloon. If it is comfortable, hold the breath for a few seconds and then exhale, allowing the out-breath to be longer than the in-breath. (Repeat 2 more times)

Thank you!

Questions

1. How might you practice gratitude during your typical day? Where do you fit it in? Would you be willing to pick a day and practice in the morning or afternoon?
2. What do you think about one day this week of practicing gratitude for others and then the next day reversing it, taking in others' gratitude for you?
3. How does it feel to focus on being the recipient, versus the giver, of the gratitude?