

The Practice of Gratitude
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Plants, animals and human beings
All must eat to live
And to nourish one another
We bless those that die
To give us food
Let us eat consciously
Resolving by our work
To pay the debt
Of our existence.

Issue of "Blame" : External to Internal Locus of Control

There is an old Chinese story of a man in a rowboat crossing a river in the early morning fog. He sees another boat approaching and calls to the other boat to watch out. When the boat doesn't change its course he stands up yelling wildly as the boat rams into him and knocks him into the water. Only when he climbs back into his boat does he see that the other boat was empty and drifting towards him with the current.

blame
random
unavoidable

There are many ways to read this story, but it is clear that blaming the oncoming boat did not help the man. Blaming doesn't seem to eliminate suffering. Making someone else guilty may make us feel better temporarily, but only at a significant cost. Gratitude in a sense is the opposite of blame. It does not demand that anyone is guilty. There is no one to blame for → adversity. Gratitude changes our perceptions of suffering from something done *to* us to something that we can make a choice about accepting or denying. In psychological terms, this choice is powerful because it moves the locus of control from external to internal.

But more skill may
be cause &
effect.

Good: cause
1) control

There are several exercises that are helpful in beginning to experience gratitude in group process. I ~~described above the exercise that enumerates the labors that go into a loaf of bread.~~ ^{for example} The following is ~~another~~ ^{or} very simple exercise, While sitting in a circle each person completes the sentence stem, "At this moment I am grateful (for, about, when, because)...". Each person can complete this in any way they want. Some will focus on things, others on situations. This exercise can be deepened by allowing some time for silent reflection either before or between cycles. It has the effect of reinforcing gratitude that is already present and opening up awareness of new possibilities for gratitude.

Is there a program with it?
I cover it
(?)
congratulate
acknowledge
only me
celebrate not
-5-
a stage

Another exercise can be done to cultivate gratitude for the opportunity to give. This can be explored in a discussion format, or can be done as a guided imagery meditation with the following instructions: Reflect for a moment on a time when someone did something nice for you. When you recall the gratitude that you felt for that other person, allow it to intensify. Now recall a time when you did something for another person. It may have been giving someone a gift, helping someone in need, or simply saying ^{some} something nice to someone. Recall the positive feelings that occurred in you.

It is difficult to maintain awareness of the good fortune that we have in ^(Amen!) our lives. Even things as basic as being born human, and having food and shelter are easy to take for ^{granted}

Awareness is at the heart of gratitude. Without awareness and openness to experience, there can be no gratitude. So increasing awareness is a good beginning to making gratitude a practice, Gratitude occurs naturally in our lives ^{for} and increasing awareness of it is self-reinforcing. Each time we are aware of gratitude, the positive feeling helps us cultivate more gratitude in other situations.

I'm not sure I agree.
I believe we need to cultivate it.
Yes.

Gratitude for the opportunity to give

In my own experience the desire to give or to serve arises naturally out of awareness of abundance, good fortune and the sense of interdependence.

Just as in Taoist philosophy, yang when full must become yin, each thing naturally becoming its opposite, ^{as these lessons are learned and unlearned.} so must the abundance of gifts received become gifts given. Breathing provides an excellent concrete example. Each breath taken in is followed by a breath out; it is accepted and then given back. Imagine for a moment only breathing in and never breathing out. The problem is obvious. We

Just this is
trivial - I
believe it
can't
happen
necessarily
unless the
lesson is
needed.

need to remember that we are not all as capable of gratitude and compassion. At times we simply won't be capable of gratitude. These are the times to look for the slightest seeds of compassion-not only for others but for ourselves. Most of all we need to be able to forgive ourselves.

Another risk is the risk of trivializing difficulties. Gratitude in difficult situations can become a kind of "Pollyanna" approach which denies the reality of suffering and respect for those in suffering. If a difficult situation begins to feel bland or uninteresting, that is a clue that you might be trivializing or denying the reality of the suffering.

good -

The Native American tradition expresses gratefulness for every living being and for every aspect of the living earth. At the core of this kind of gratitude is the willingness to accept all things fully and the courage not to censor any object from the domain of gratitude. As Brother Steindl-Rast says: "True gratefulness is the courage to give thanks for a gift before unwrapping it." (1984, p. 111) It is really a matter of attitude, the same attitude found in karma yoga, where the essence is to do one's duty without concern for outcome. Gratitude seems to be best practiced without attachment to outcome and may in fact be a tool for relinquishment of attachment to specific outcomes. This attitude is at the heart of the work with gratitude and

?
True
Heart

✓

The commentary begins - "*When evil fills the world and it's inhabitants, change adverse conditions into the path of awakening*" (McLeod, 1987, p. 17). The first step in the transformation of adverse conditions into the path of awakening according to the commentaries is to "drive all blame into one" and the second is to "be grateful to everyone" (McLeod, 1987, pp. 17-18). This takes some explanation.

To understand the statement "drive all blame into one" there has to be some understanding of two presuppositions. The first is the idea of dependant co-arising which means that no two events or beings are ever truly separate from each other. In this case it means that the cause of suffering never exists separate from the suffering, but "co-arises" with it. The second presupposition is the understanding that the ego clings to the idea of a self that is separate from everything else. The phrase "Drive all blame into one" means to realize that the experience of suffering is as much a result of ego clinging, or the desire to be an ego which is separate from suffering, as it is the result of outside events. This viewpoint helps create an internal locus of control and prevents blaming of others. ("Drive all blame into one" does not mean that you should blame *yourself* for suffering. What it says is that blame is "empty" in the buddhist sense, in that there is *no one* to blame.)

With an internal locus of control, a choice can be made about how to relate to adversity. The second instruction, "be grateful to everyone", is a *choice* about how to relate to the world which is an alternative to the choice of blaming. Gratitude is not the only way to relate to the world, but one that can be useful or skillful. It alters our perceptions towards the positive by reciprocal inhibition. Since it is difficult to hold opposites simultaneously in mind, for the period when one is grateful it is impossible to blame.

This is an important level of reality. But would you give his advice to victims of child abuse? Gratitude not initially.



limits of gratitude

There are some remarkable examples of gratitude in the face of adversity. For example the Dalai Lama was asked how he felt toward the government of China who had murdered many of his people and forced him to leave his country and to live in exile. His answer was that he felt compassion for the great pain that they were in and gratitude for the opportunity they give him to practice forgiveness¹. Others have talked about the exile of the Tibetans in terms of the event being necessary to bring these teachings out of Tibet and into the west. And yet I find my ability to be grateful for many less painful circumstances very limited. For example, at present as I'm writing today, I find it difficult to have gratitude about the Persian Gulf crisis, or environmental destruction. Gradually I understand some of these problems as seeds for the cultivation of forgiveness or compassion, as modeled by the Dalai Lama, but it remains only an understanding and not in integrated felt sense. The cultivation of the cognitive understanding and the subsequent integration will possibly come with practice.

.. A Course in Miracles says it this way-

We thank our Father for one thing alone; that we are separate from no living thing, and therefore one with Him. And we rejoice that no exceptions can be made which would reduce our Wholeness....We give thanks for every living thing, for otherwise we offer thanks for nothing, and we fail to recognize the gifts of God to us. (1975, Vol. 2, pp. 362-3)

May want to
also say, 2. (a
Chakra Smith,
used to be (a
(at death time)
but still need
to be cleared
to fit with
the spirit
This is a form
and in a
written expression,
of all is up.
But in double
mode, the
translation is
more difficult,
I can be
misunderstood - it
depends on who
(I refer to the
cases etc.)

Examples of Gratitude

Putting on these clothes,

I am grateful to those who made them
and to the materials from which they were made.

I wish everyone could have enough to wear.

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 1990, p. 15)

And in the Jewish tradition there is a morning prayer of Gratitude
which is said as the ^{first thought upon awakening, a way to} greet the world:
I thank you, living and eternal Presence, for
you have returned my soul to me. My trust in you is
great.

grace

Meals offer another good time to acknowledge gratitude. Saying

"grace" before meals is practiced in many traditions. It can be a time to praise
the food, the guests, family, or to acknowledge thanks for a higher power.

This practice goes back to the deep meaning of gratitude- "to praise aloud".

pp. 2-3.
Art Scroll
Seder,
1985
N.Y. Research
publication
16

There is also a blessing after the meal in Judaism. This blessing, the Birkhat Hamotz, is based in part on a verse from Deuteronomy (8:10) "when you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God ...". It is a moment to give pause to say thanks for feeling full and complete - not only with food, but for all blessings and fullness in our life, a moment to appreciate the nurture and nourishment we have received.

Gratitude is not something that
you *should* experience. Either you do or you don't. In my experience
gratitude is not something that can be forced, but it *can* be cultivated. It is like
a seed that can be planted in rich soil and watered, but it must grow on its
own. At times when it is very difficult to find something to be grateful for it
can be useful to shift focus to the very simple things such as breath or food
where gratitude is easily found. These simple gratitudes can form the
foundation for other gratitude.

Good
to
do

In the context of gratitude I seem to have more acceptance and less resistance to adversity. However in my personal experience, and in my experience working with groups, there is often a strong desire to use gratitude as escape or avoidance of discomfort rather than as a tool for growth or learning. Without a willingness to experience suffering, gratitude for suffering is just a subtle form of denial. Gratitude can be a way to experience suffering without denial. When suffering is experienced without denial, when it is experienced with open eyes and open arms, it provides us with an opportunity to use it as a teacher, as "grist for the mill". This however is very difficult.

Good point

When the basic needs are taken care of there ^{is} a desire to serve. When the opportunity to serve is prevented it can be painful.

Stagnation or
generativity.
This is a
choice.
Careful of
making it seem
too easy!

Milarepa, the great Tibetan saint, was sitting in a cave and was met by three horrible demons with skulls cracked open and flames surrounding them. When they noticed that Milarepa was not upset by their presence, and in fact invited them in for tea, they asked him how he could not be appalled and disgusted. He replied that they reminded him how grateful he was that he was following a path of love and acceptance.

Even the horrible demons that come to Milarepa's door, when welcomed and appreciated, are teachers, and are deserving of gratitude. The context of gratitude allows for appreciation of the value of situations that might otherwise be seen to have no value at ^{all}.

groups,

This physician had a reputation for working well with seriously ill patients. He was able to remain emotionally present even at the time of death. He was able to see death as a natural part of living; it may be sad, but it is not necessarily a failure. This allowed him to remain open to death when other physicians may have withdrawn. A similar adjustment in our attitude towards adversity helps us approach adversity with the openness of gratitude.

Do certain beliefs about the nature of the universe facilitate this openness? His attitude?

Summary

can be cultivated, and, in turn?

Gratitude seems to unfold naturally; encompassing less and less egocentric objects. It also seems to involve a shift from withdrawal to approach. In addition to the benefits discussed above there is another less tangible or at least less scientific mechanism that I notice in my own practice with gratitude. As I experience gratitude towards more and more things I begin to feel less defended towards them. I begin to feel what might be called an opening of the heart. What began as an exercise in mindfulness becomes an experience of "heartfulness". Along with increased gratefulness comes increased acceptance, forgiveness and joy. It is hard to be unforgiving and unjoyful in the context of gratitude.