

*Why Looking Back
Helps You Move Forward
The Value Of Reflection & Gratitude
In A Busy
& Slightly Crazy World*



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Why Looking Back Helps You Move Forward
The Value of Reflection & Gratitude in a Busy & Slightly Crazy World

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Introduction

Do you agree our world is a super busy one? Are you plugged into it via some device 24/7? Ever felt you didn't have time for a cup of coffee, let alone reflection?

Despite all of that, many top CEOs and business leaders report starting and ending their day with reflection and an expression of gratitude—without the use of *any* technology! Wonder why they might do this so regularly?

We all know self-reflection is probably a good thing to do. But we often forget that it provides the opportunity to notice and explore the emotions and thoughts that usually go unnoticed during the rush of the day. And when that happens (which is often) those unnoticed thoughts and feelings decide to become more extreme and start *demanding* your attention.

Reflection puts you ahead of the game by granting you the power to stop extremes before they take shape.

When you decide to focus on feeling grateful each day, you offer yourself the opportunity to look beyond your own world and notice how life affected you positively: a great massage, good running shoes, umbrellas when it rains, boots and gloves when it snows, spaghetti dinners at your favorite Italian restaurant.

We are so busy we rarely remember that someone had to be using their own life energy to make these things happen—the things that improve your life.

A moment of gratitude sends an acknowledgement of what others do with their life energy—and how it's benefiting you.

The bonus? Thankfulness allows your own heart to expand, even if only a bit. And that always feels good (even if it's sometimes embarrassing)!

Do you expect yourself to move through your daily tasks at an incredible speed? Do you get so driven by determination to succeed that you forget to look back and notice

you haven't taken the time to savor the little things that truly make life worth living? You might realize you've been so busy *being busy* that you didn't even remember there were roses to smell, much less deciding to stop and smell them.

What you may not realize is that embracing self-reflection and gratitude are critical components of your well-being—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Self Reflection: A Waste Of Time?

Self-reflection is not a time to beat yourself up for mistakes or repeatedly play out unhappy situations in your mind.

Instead, reflection is a quiet time you set aside to discover who you've been that day and where it's directing you in the future.

Reflection is the practice of looking deeply on the inside so you can determine your successes *and* your failures. There are lessons to learn from both outcomes. Learn the lessons and you can then do more of what's working.

Self-reflection frees you to consciously and intentionally recognize and interrupt automatic behaviors and attitudes that don't take you where you want to go.

Do you view self-reflection as a waste of your precious time? Well, here's why the time it takes is actually priceless. Reflecting improves your life. It allows you to evaluate your goals and strengths, relationships, behaviors, and actions. It frees you to assess how far you've come in building the skill sets you need for a happy, productive, and successful life, both at work and at home.

Too often you actually waste your precious time by bemoaning how far you've yet to go—a completely unproductive way of seeing things without *also* seeing how far you've come.

In the long run (and often the short run as well), setting aside time for reflection will make you happier. Would you really want to call this time wasted if it taught you more

about how to feel satisfied and happy with yourself and your life? You may not like the process, but I guarantee you'll like the outcome.



Gratitude: Sappy & Unproductive?

Let's look at gratitude. Feeling grateful is more than just offering an obligatory 'thank you'. It's more than an intellectual exercise, or a way of keeping yourself in the good graces of others.

At its best, gratitude is a state of being. That means living life from an attitude of appreciation for 1) being alive and 2) for all that comes into your life—good and bad.

Gratitude arises from a particular way of viewing life. It can start with an intention to recognize the richness of your emotional connections with others, and all the good things that bless your life. But gratitude offers far more wealth than just that.

When you get the hang of it, you can also extend gratitude to all the *unpleasant* events in your life as well. Actually, gratitude is pretty blind to the labels of both positive and negative.

Gratitude just wants to find what's valuable in every experience and claim that richness as its own.

Gratitude can easily embrace what you call negative and unpleasant events. It arises from approaching experiences and people as messengers attempting to bring you something you need to learn or attend to.

When you learn to recognize and graciously receive these gifts from the darker sides of life, gratitude expands exponentially. That means life is thrilled with you and delights in showering you with its amazing presence.

You want to remember that gratitude is not only the result of an attitude or point of view. It is also an experience, or, if you prefer, an actual feeling in your body. *Focusing* on gratitude is an essential element in granting you the *experience* of it in your body.



The Power Of Your Point Of View

Your point of view creates the transformation of anger, greed, and discontent to a life filled with forgiveness, contentment, and moderation.

Consistent effort at claiming this point of view means practicing until reflection becomes your joy and delight; and feeling gratitude toward the gifts of life becomes a habit.

At first, you will probably have to look hard to find the gifts, messages, or signals hiding out in the negative or unpleasant experiences. But once you've learned how to ferret them out, you'll naturally behave as a kinder and more gracious human being—not out of responsibility to others, but because it's become who you are.

In this eBook, you'll explore a variety of perspectives that fuel the need for self-reflection and gratitude, the benefits of each, and how to go about starting and maintaining a reflection and gratitude practice.



The Importance of Reflection and Gratitude



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The Importance of Reflection & Gratitude

When you take a moment to reflect upon a boring day, or even a disastrous day, you'll find it is filled with valuable gifts.

Imagine this scene that was recently described to me: A long line of people stand in a checkout line at the new shopping mall.. A lady with her arms full of items, trying to manage a cane *and* the hand of her grandson squiggling next to her, waits patiently for her turn to check out. A total stranger, who was next in line to check out, motions her to step in front of him. Her face beams with gratitude as she graciously accepts his kindness and walks past the three people standing in front of her to take his place.

It was just a minor act of kindness, but it overwhelmed her heart with happiness. She experienced a genuine moment of sincere gratitude with such joy that it altered the course of her day.

One of the most important components for attracting prosperity and abundance is gratitude. No matter how brief the experience, joy and abundance are gratitude's eternal sidekicks. When you actually FEEL abundant, prosperous, and joyful, the *notion* of gratitude becomes your personal reality.

You might also feel a sense of being indebted either to the person who took care of you or helped you out. But this feeling is actually tapping into an advanced awareness of our connection to each other—one human being to another. The experience of this intimate human connection may help you tap into an awareness of being connected to everything in the Universe.

Gratitude can flow freely when you break out of your viewpoints, expectations, and dramas centered solely on yourself.. You can then appreciate the intentions and even the simplest gesture of kindness. Everything can look lighter, brighter, and richer.

As I hinted earlier, I supported you in countless ways through every moment of your life. For example, think of all those farmers who grew the wheat, and the engineers who built the harvesting machines, and the mechanics who kept them going, and the people who build and run the milling machines that create the bread and the spaghetti

you eat for dinner. When you think of this, you can feel a sense of gratitude and appreciation for more and more of your daily life experiences.

Reflect back to when you woke up this morning. Run through the day's events and notice all the luxuries of your life. How you appreciate the rich taste of your morning coffee or the steamy warmth and fragrance of your tea. Think of the process and the journey the coffee and the tea had to take to find you savoring its presence in your cup.

As you reflect on all that you experience every day in your world and the abundance of the life you live, you will most likely feel an indescribable sense of gratitude. This reflection delivers an insight that is both humbling and motivating to exercise your natural inner desire to be generous and of service to others.



The Benefits of Reflection

When you look in a mirror, you see a reflection of what's in front of it. The reflection you see isn't the actual object in front of the mirror. This is helpful to remember during self-reflection.

What you see isn't actually you. But it offers you a glimpse of *how you're showing up* in the world at that moment.

Many people avoid self-reflection because they fear what they will find. I agree, it can be frightening. But when your goal is to be happy (personally and professionally), you'll find it's valuable to face up to things you know aren't working for you. You've grabbed the opportunity to do it differently from that point on.

Some of the benefits of self-reflection include:

- **An Increase In Emotional Intelligence**

Self-awareness and self-regulation are the two components that make up emotional intelligence. Self-awareness grants you an understanding of your behaviors, values, strengths, goals, and emotions. It shows you how those things affect others in your life. Self-regulation is required for managing and redirecting hurtful emotions and impulses that you previously acted out. Self-awareness leads to self-regulation. Self-regulation is the action part of the formula. It's valuable when you choose to change your circumstances by altering *your reactions* to the world around you.

- **A Heightening Of Integrity and Leadership**

When you know and understand yourself better, you can make smarter decisions that improve your life. It's truly helpful to keep tabs on your values. They can sometimes change without your noticing. You can usually tell when that's happening by a new sense of confusion when one value seems to conflict with another. By being committed to your values, you can make better decisions. You more readily match up your choices and actions against the life values you respect.

- **A More Compelling Self-Confidence**

Practicing self-reflection can highlight your strengths. It can pinpoint the actions you can see are wise to take if you want to improve your strengths. This gives you confidence in what you can envision achieving in the future. This newfound depth of self-confidence will spill over into all aspects of your life, creating a happier, more fulfilling journey.

- **More Awareness Of A Practical Wisdom**

You may view wisdom as something beyond your reach and somewhat impractical in today's world. But when self-reflection becomes a daily practice, you open to a new awareness of options and possibilities that seemed impossible before. Wisdom is by definition, something that is useful. If it's useful, then it's practical. And heaven knows, in today's crazy world, you need more practical wisdom for how to be happy and productive without throwing yourself (and your health) under the bus.

- **Better Communication & Ease In Relationships**

Relationships are complex and complicated. I think everyone can agree on that! Self-reflection allows you to identify where you're adding to or creating mis-communication and conflict. It frees you to walk past blame and into the arms of authentic responsibility for your own actions. Relationships are always composed of at least two components—you and the other. Self-reflection invites you to see yourself from the other's point of view and to realize your way of viewing them may need some serious tweaking.



Why Is Reflection Important?

Reflecting helps you develop your skills and review their effectiveness. This frees you from just carrying on doing things as you have always done them. It is about questioning, in a positive, curious way, what you do and why you do it. Then you can decide whether there is a better, or more efficient, way of doing it in the future.

In any role, whether at home or at work, reflection is an important part of learning. You wouldn't use a recipe a second time around if the dish didn't work the first time, would you? You would either adjust the recipe or find a new and, hopefully, better one. Reflection allows you to notice that you've become stuck in a routine that may not be working effectively. Thinking about your skills for maintaining physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health throughout your day can help you identify the shifts and adjustments you might need to make.

Reflect and Inquire Into These Areas Every Day:

- **Strengths**—Did I exercise my strengths today?
- **Weaknesses**—Did I let my weaknesses take the lead today?
- **Skills**—What skills did I use today and which did I forget I have?
- **Relationships**—How aware was I today of the other? How well did I communicate?
- **Problems**—Did I approach my life today as a problem or an adventure?
- **Achievements**—Did I achieve anything I set out to accomplish today?
- **Happiness**—How much of today did I feel happy? Sad? Overwhelmed? What can I do in the future to enjoy more happiness regardless of what unfolds?
- **Solutions**—What do I need to learn to allow any conflict in each of these areas to be accepted and then resolved?

At first, self-reflection can seem difficult, or even selfish or embarrassing. But you will find it becomes easier with practice, and the result could be a happier and more efficient you.



Benefits of Gratitude

Appreciating others and saying ‘thank you’ and ‘you’re welcome’ is good for your health and peace of mind. Studies in positive psychology and happiness suggest an attitude of gratitude improves physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Research shows people who frequently feel grateful experience:

- Increased energy
- More optimism
- Increased social connections
- More happiness

People who approach life with an eye for gratitude are less likely to be:

- Anxious
- Depressed
- Self-absorbed
- Greedy
- Suffering from substance abuse
- Struggling economically
- Sleep deprived
- Sedentary



Why Is Gratitude Important?

According to research from the positive psychology movement, cultivating gratitude acts as a form of cognitive-behavioral therapy. That means a gratitude practice will begin to create thought patterns that can positively affect your mood and outlook.

Although the notion of gratitude sounds simple, it is actually a complex ‘state of being’ that embraces self-reflection, humility, and empathy for others. Being grateful requires a shift in mindset from negativity, blaming others, focusing on problems, or perceived injustices, to appreciating and giving credit to others.

Psychological research shows you tend to feel happy when you feel grateful. It also shows that regularly experiencing gratitude can help you elevate and sustain a more consistent level of happiness throughout your day. But ... keep in mind that it takes *regular* practice for gratitude to take on the shape of a healthy habit.

Imagine intentionally focusing on the things in your life for which you’re grateful: significant relationships, achievements, contributions others have made in helping you accomplish your goals, small kindnesses from loved ones, or even the experience of sitting quietly for just a moment without your phone intruding with yet another email or text.

Gratitude increases well-being because it promotes the savoring of positive experiences. When you contemplate your blessings, you squeeze the most out of them. You stop taking things for granted and notice the small things with a sense of wonder and appreciation. Gratitude allows you to get the most from the good things in your life. And when you’re an adept, you know how to get the most good from the bad things as well.

Simply put, gratitude is an attitude. It is a conscious choice you can select for yourself. The one thing you can always choose each day, in any situation, is your attitude. Therefore, it is definitely within your power to always choose an attitude of gratitude. Using that power will bring you more happiness, joy, and peace of mind.



Reflection



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REFLECTION

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” ~Socrates

We all live hectic lives. You work hard and find endless ways to keep busy. With the internet, email, mobile phones and texts, you can do business virtually anywhere. That means you can stay in touch with people on a 24/7 basis.

This connectivity makes it easy to stay busy. Being busy can, of course, be a good thing. It can mean you are successful and socially active, or a sign that you are in demand.

But just as it is important to fill your day with exciting or necessary activities, it is important to take some time for yourself—to relax, renew, and reflect upon your life.

Few people take the time for self-reflection. Self-reflection isn't just unwinding by doing nothing productive or watching television. In fact, it involves a lot of brain activity. It means you've set aside some time to let events, thoughts, and experiences pass through your mind so you can constructively evaluate them.

This self-evaluation will help you be the person you want to be - and to craft what you want your future to be.

Self-reflection means switching your mindset *for a while* away from productivity and success. Focus instead on allowing yourself the space to consider where you are and where you are going.

If you avoid self-reflection, you can easily keep yourself stuck in the same situations. You can keep doing the same things over and over and just hoping something will change. This, my friend, is a very popular recipe. But it is a recipe that will not help you learn and grow.

You are likely a strong candidate for adding a self-reflection practice into your life if you feel taking time for such 'fluff' is a waste of time.

In actuality, it doesn't take a lot of time and it's not as hard as it might seem. You don't *need* to meditate for three or five hours a day to become more self-aware. You don't *need* to go to an ashram or find a guru in order to reflect on how you can ensure you live the life you want to be living.



Reflection's High ROI

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to run through life. It feels like it's moving so fast that you end up struggling to just keep up with the day-to-day. This event signals the need to switch on autopilot. Then, before you know it, you feel you've lost yourself.

*Taking time each day or a few times a week for self-reflection
can actually slow down your otherwise busy life.*

Hurried life styles cause us to forget the important benefits offered by self-reflection. Below are a few of the ways you'll experience this 'return on your investment' that ongoing self-reflection offers. These also are some reasons many influential thinkers, go-getters, and productivity experts make time for self-reflection regularly.

- **Personal Growth**

Self-reflection enables you to learn about yourself, so you can determine the right course of action for where you want to go in life. It also gives you a chance to slow down and determine if you are happy, and if not, how you can change that. You discover your ineffective patterns that arise when you go on autopilot—the ones that aren't serving you—so you can make different choices. Without self-reflection, there can be very little personal growth.

- **Stress Relief**

Self-reflection allows you to come to terms with your inner feelings. Sometimes life provides so many distractions that you don't take the time to *feel*, so you push your emotions deep inside. However, keeping your feelings inside can lead to stress and irritability. By regularly expressing yourself, you can alleviate stress. Also, self-reflection lets you see things in a more accurate light. Often you're stressed because you perceive things to be worse than they actually are.

- **Success Evaluation**

By taking time to self-reflect, you can assess whether you are reaching your goals and why. Ever get discouraged because you aren't where you thought you would be? You start the year off with goals and aspirations and then assume you are incapable when you don't achieve them.

Regular reflection allows you to assess where you are in reaching your goals. Then you can make the adjustments and changes needed to accomplish the success you desire.

- **Alignment Of Perceptions**

Many people choose to keep busy, so they don't have to evaluate their lives. They don't want to review all their perceived failures or start second-guessing choices they've made in the past. However, it's important to review "failures," so you don't repeat them. And often, when you reflect on them, you realize they weren't failures at all, but learning experiences that got you where you are today. If you don't look closely at what you could have done differently, it's going to be much more difficult to find the success you are seeking.

- **Goal Assessment**

Whether you have set formal goals that you are working towards, or more general ones, self-reflection gives you the space and time to evaluate how the actions you are taking are working. You can get off track during busy times, so it's good to come back to yourself and reevaluate where you are. You may even find your goals change over time once you develop a consistent self-reflection practice. As you get to know yourself better, you may find what you thought you wanted isn't really what you want to create in your life.

- **Increased Happiness**

How many people do you think you know who are truly happy? Many people go through their day-to-day life bored and uninspired. But it doesn't have to be that way! Reflecting on your life is the beginning of finding genuine happiness. Without taking the time to recognize what's

causing your dissatisfaction, how will you be able to address it so you can live your life to the fullest?

- **Practical Wisdom**

Wisdom is the intelligent application of your current life lessons. It draws out a deeper knowing and understanding that triggers a new level of creativity into action. Wisdom offers encouragement and a sense of emotional safety. Wisdom guides you to learn from your personal experience. This wisdom remains out of reach when your body is in the grips of stress and worry.

- **Clarity**

It's wonderful to see with sharpness, lucidity, and coherence. Clarity frees the ability to allow the issue in question to be not only a problem or challenge, but also part of the larger whole working for you. For example, let's say you have a favorite tapestry hanging in your office. Stress results when you focus on the tiny flaw you just noticed in the lower left corner. You worry about how to fix it. Clarity shifts your focus to the reality of the whole tapestry, or the bigger picture. Focusing on the whole that holds the flaw within it opens the door to new perspectives and options previously unseen. Without clarity, confusion can reign.

- **Joy**

Who doesn't want a happy and delightful state of mind that redirects the heart to cheerfulness and a warm delight? Joy changes your physiology and brain chemistry, allowing you greater access to your frontal lobe and the critical thinking so essential to effective decision making. Without an occasional dose of joy, daily life can become an unwelcome burden.

- **Guidance**

Wouldn't you like directions from a higher aspect of yourself? Until you connect with this inner guidance, it remains just a lovely notion. But once you've touched its presence within yourself, you can more easily let

go of stressing out. In this way you create space for the best way to handle the situation to rise into view.

- **Courage**

Everyone wants courage, that unique quality of mind or spirit that allows you to stand up to difficulties, pain, and experiences of loss without allowing fear to take the lead. You can call forth courage most easily by acknowledging any fear or trembling deep within.

- **Understanding**

Understanding is freedom and power - the power to comprehend, interpret, or explain the current circumstance from a different and usually larger perspective. This allows more room for creative action to arise. Understanding sheds lights on dark situations and offers new avenues of resolution that you cannot find in the dark.

- **Insight**

Have you ever had a flash, or a glimpse of the inner nature of a situation, what it's all about, and what you are to learn from its presence? Insight often combines all the above gifts in a swift flash of understanding, clarity, and gratitude that leave strength, courage, trust, faith, and wisdom reverberating in its wake.



Make Self-Reflection a Habit

I've mentioned that it takes consistent self-reflection to benefit from the activity. That means making it into a habit.

You may think you don't have time to add one more thing to your already packed schedule. But what if I told you that by taking time to reflect on what's going on in your life, you won't need to be as busy as you are now? Wouldn't that be a welcome relief?

Here's how making self-reflection a habit can make your life easier and more efficient:

- **Reflection Helps You Learn From Your Mistakes**

If you don't reflect on your mistakes, you are doomed to repeat them. However, if you reflect to discover what went wrong, to learn how you can prevent it happening again in the future, then you can use this to get better. Mistakes are a valuable learning tool and not something that should make you feel embarrassed or upset.

- **Reflection Grants You Powerful Insights**

When you stop all of your busy activity and contemplate your life, you come up with creative solutions to your problems or issues. Have you ever noticed when you stop mulling over a problem and just let your mind wander or consider other things how the answer pops into your head? That's what happens during self-reflection. You can end up with creative solutions to issues that have perplexed you by 'wasting some time' in reflection, instead of banging your head against a wall.

- **Reflection Makes You Feel Happier**

When you reflect on the things you did right—on your successes—it allows you to celebrate every little success. You realize how much you've done right and how far you've come, which builds your self-confidence to tackle the next goal or project. Reflecting on your successes and knowing where you are going also gives you a sense of purpose, making every task in life lighter and easier.

- **Reflection Offers You Perspective On All Things**

Often you may get caught up in the troubles or the busy activity of your daily life. Demands and responsibilities sometimes feel overwhelming. But if you take a minute to step back, and reflect on these problems, and how in the grand scheme of things they don't mean all that much, it can calm you down and lower your stress levels. You gain perspective when you can see the bigger picture, which makes you happier, less reactionary, and more able to be present to your 'here and now'.



Self-Reflection Tips

I mentioned earlier that self-reflection doesn't need to take up much of your time, especially when done consistently.

Below you will find simple tips and techniques that can help you start your self-reflection habit.

- **Traditional Journaling**

The vast power of keeping a journal has gotten a lot of media attention in the last few years, and there's a good reason. It works. Journaling helps crystalize your reflections and gives you a place to dream and plan that is safe and private. It's a great way to ramble on to yourself, find creative solutions to problems that have been bothering you, or discover the answer to an annoying question that's been pestering you for ages.

- **One-Sentence Journaling**

If you've tried journaling in the past but had a hard time keeping up with it, try the one-sentence journal. It's a habit you might love, especially when you look back on a year's worth of entries. Simply create a sentence that encapsulates where you are in your life *that day*, including challenges, emotions, and thoughts. Once you've gotten into the routine of writing just one line daily, you'll soon look forward to the practice and writing in more detail than just one sentence.

- **Setting A Specific Time & Place**

Choose a time and place to practice self-reflection. It's tough to remember to do something like this when you aren't in the habit yet, so a good way to remember is to have a trigger. A trigger is a habit or activity which you perform every day to remind you to take the time to reflect. For example, you may do it after you brush your teeth in the morning, before going to bed, or during your first cup of coffee each morning.

- **Share & Create A Blog Post Or Tweet**

Go public with some of your ah-ha moments by using a personal blog or social media. Of course, you don't want to get too graphic or give too much personal information away, but this is a good way to stay accountable for reflecting

consistently. You might change your settings so that only a few people you are close to can see those posts.

- **Use An App**

Did you know there's an app for self-reflection? Yep, in fact, there are several that can help you get started with a self-reflection practice. Using an app is a nice way to remember to practice and gives you an option of using technology if that's how you like to do things. Here's one you might like called [A Question A Day](#).

A regular self-reflection practice can be an important element in your daily routine. Self-reflection allows you to think about how things are working for or against you at the moment, and how you want to tackle any problems.

Taking a moment to reflect on how your day or week has another important benefit. You are allowing yourself to take a time-out from all social settings. This is valuable because it frees you to spend some quality time with yourself, and only with yourself.

The result? You can continue your day with new and fresh ideas for how to develop your potential to lead a happier and more fulfilling life.



Gratitude



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Gratitude

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what you 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 your past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.” ~Melody Beattie

Gratitude is a state of mind arising when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside of yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures. Whether it's the sight of a lovely face or a tasty bite of food or good health, you can always be grateful for something. And as I've said earlier, when you're adept at this, even bad experiences are embraced, for they've come to teach you something.

Gratitude is not just a feeling outside your control. It doesn't just show up willy-nilly. It's more like a radio channel that you can choose to tune into at any time. It is an attitude that you can pick up or put down.

Gratitude embraces the reality of a connection. Perhaps this is why it is central to spiritual traditions worldwide, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, etc.. When you truly open and contemplate your place in the intricate, interdependent network of life, you feel wonder and joy. That realization can lead to an expression of thankfulness.

If you are resentful, you cannot experience gratitude. Attempting to express gratitude out of duty to another is misplaced and misdirected.

Gratitude isn't about what you are giving another. Gratitude is about you and what it gives you.

Inquire within yourself to understand the root that blocks your progress in embracing gratitude. Once it's identified, acknowledge the interference, and invite it to observe you as you dance with possibilities through exercising gratitude. In time, healing and transformation will occur. Be patient with the process and yourself.



Gratitude's Gracious ROI

Research shows gratitude, more than anything else, is strongly linked to mental health and life satisfaction. It seems grateful people experience more moments of joy, love, and enthusiasm. They know how to embrace and learn from seemingly destructive emotions like envy, greed, and bitterness.

It seems gratitude:

- reduces your risk of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders.
- helps people entangled with these and other problems to heal and find closure.
- can give you a deep and steadfast trust that goodness exists, even in the face of uncertainty or suffering.

Not only is gratitude a warm and uplifting way to feel, but it also benefits the body.

People who experience gratitude:

- cope better with stress
- recover more quickly from illness and injury
- maintain lower blood pressure and better immune system function

Unlike other positive emotions, like hope and happiness, gratitude is inherently relational. Grateful people are seen as more helpful, outgoing, optimistic, and trustworthy.

Gratitude frees you to:

- reach past your personal experience and into the social realm
- feel inspired to generate your own acts of kindness
- extend heartfelt gifts of your own
- strengthen your bond with other people



Starting a Gratitude Practice

Gratitude isn't just an emotion that happens . It is a state of being that you can call forth and inhabit.

Think of gratitude as something you can practice—like meditation, yoga, or pilates. Gratitude practice begins by paying attention.

Notice all the good things you normally take for granted. Did you sleep well last night? Did someone at work or on the street treat you with courtesy? Have you glimpsed the sky, with its sun and clouds, and had a moment of peace?

It also involves acknowledging difficult and painful moments as instructive, like messengers delivering gifts. Feeling grateful for them as well directs your attention away from feeling like a victim.

Second, consider writing in a journal or composing a letter. Writing helps to organize thoughts, accept experiences, and put them into context. Gratitude journaling may bring a new and redemptive frame of reference to difficult life situations.

It also helps you create meaning when you place everyday experiences within a framework of gifts and gratefulness. Writing helps you magnify and expand the sources of goodness in your life. It helps you think about what resources you've gained from your experiences, especially those bad ones.

In one study, people randomly assigned to keep weekly gratitude journals exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, and felt better about their lives. They were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to people assigned to record hassles or neutral events.

In another study, young adults who kept a daily gratitude journal reported higher alertness, enthusiasm, determination, and attentiveness. These young adults had more energy than people who focused on hassles or others who were less fortunate.

Expressing gratitude expands and amplifies the feeling of connection.

Many people in your life have helped you in one way or another. Have you thanked them? Consider sending a letter to someone telling them what their actions meant to you, even if—especially if—it happened long ago. There are countless ways to express your gratitude. It may even be as simple as a moment of deliberate reflection.

Suggestion For The Easily Negative:

When contemplating a Gratitude Journal, instead think of creating a Gripes & Gratitude Journal. Go ahead and write down your gripes for the day. BUT THEN ... you have to write down an equal number of gratitudes for the day.

Honoring your gripes allows you to acknowledge what your mind truly believes is the truth about your day. Once your gripes have the space to be recognized and voiced, you can then find the space to notice what you can also be grateful for in that same day.



Gratitude Practice Tips

Gratitude, or appreciation for the good things that happen in life, is an essential part of building happiness. When you're going through a tough time, it's hard to remember to be grateful for the good stuff. But, if you try it, there is a cornucopia of benefits gained from working gratitude into your everyday life.

Here are a few tips to help you practice gratitude and increase your awareness of things you can be grateful for:

- **Make It Personal**

What I mean by this is instead of thinking of some obvious ones like “I’m grateful for food each day,” turn this around and think about what this specifically means for you. How are you grateful for the food? Is it because you can afford food? Because you’re able to eat it? Or because someone cooked it for you? Make practicing gratitude personal and about you. So instead, you might think “I’m so grateful for my friend cooking this meal for me when I was too tired to do it myself.”

- **Think Of Something New Each Day**

Each day challenge yourself to think of something different that you are grateful for, so your mind is stretched to think of even the smallest things. It also means you’re always alert and noticing things each day that you’re grateful for, things which perhaps you wouldn’t normally notice.

As an example, be grateful for the use of your legs. It may sound strange, but imagine your life without them for a moment. Scary? Not being able to walk places, see new things, your loss of independence. Now come back to the present moment and think of all the things you can do with those legs. Only when you lose things, do you sometimes then realize just how lucky you were to have them. Practicing the thought of *not* having something will help you realize just how grateful you can be for having it in your life here and now.

- **Stay Focused On Everything You Do Have**

Many people wish they had a bigger house, more money, a better job, the perfect body, etc... You live in a time and age where you focus on what you want rather than on all the things you already have. Take a moment to make a mental list of the most valuable things in your life—maybe your family, friends, health, and happiness. Now think—did having the latest iPhone come up near the top? Or the biggest house? Or a promotion? Practicing gratitude enables you to stay focused on all the amazing things you do have so that you can pay attention to the beauty and abundance all around you.

- **Spread Gratitude Often**

You've probably heard of paying it forward, like when someone in line at a coffee shop pays for the coffee of the next person in line behind them. It's an example of spreading gratitude. Imagine what the world would be like if you focused on all the good in your life instead of all the struggles and problems? Spreading gratitude gives you and the other person a pleasant rush of feel-good hormones that can turn an average day into something special. And hopefully, that person behind you in line will pay your gratitude forward throughout the day too, creating a lovely cycle of good will.

- **Share Your Gratitude Out Loud!**

You can't just assume people know you feel grateful towards them. If you are grateful for something someone has done for you, let them know by telling them how thankful you are! When you share your gratitude, it will increase your energy, positivity, and empathy. Doing this makes you feel better about yourself and makes others around you feel better too. Don't be selfish with praise and compliments. These cost nothing but can mean the world to others.

- **Turn Your Failure Into A Positive**

The West seems enamored with perfection. Every little mistake is analyzed, and then you spend hours beating yourself up for screwing up. You will make mistakes, and shifting your mindset around how you view them is freeing. The next time you make a mistake or try something that doesn't work out, reframe it so it's a learning opportunity and be grateful for what you learned.

- **Get Outside More Often**

The natural world is full of beauty and wonder. Things that most of the time you probably don't notice. When you take time to slow down and view the world around you, you fill your wells with inspiration and appreciation for all nature and the earth which supports you. Make a practice of going outside at least once a day and notice the surrounding beauty. Even in the city, you can look up at the clouds moving across the

sky, or the breeze blowing through the leaves on the trees. Take a short walk and notice the flowers that are blooming. Eat your lunch outside and appreciate the bird's songs. Being out in nature helps you keep your life in perspective.

- **Same Time, Same Station**

When things are going smoothly in your life, you sometimes forget to be grateful. One way to ensure you continue your practice of gratitude is to choose a time to appreciate each day. It's not important when you do it, just as long as you do it. You may count your blessings while walking your dog, or you may have a small ritual you prefer to perform. But keeping it at the same time each day will help keep it as a part of your life, even when you don't feel like practicing.

- **Use Your 'Wasted' Time**

You live in a 'hurry up and wait' culture, where standing in line is a daily occurrence. Instead of checking for updates on Facebook while in line or reading emails while riding the bus to work, practice gratitude. You don't need to waste these hours. You can carry your gratitude journal with you and jot down things, use an app to count your blessings, or just list them in your mind. Incorporating gratitude into your life is simple, yet amazingly powerful.



Conclusion



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CONCLUSION

Oprah Winfrey once said, *“Be thankful for what you have and you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.”*

While this may not be literal and this way of thinking may seem backwards or dismissive to some, it still rings true.

If you think of your life as a place for growth, like a garden, this is easy to illustrate:

As you go through your days, people in your life sow seeds into the ground of your heart, both positive and negative seeds. The positive seeds may be as encouragements, education, friendships, gifts, or small kindnesses. The negative seeds could be things such as criticisms, discouragements, and arguments.

While you cannot control which seeds blow through your garden, you are in control of what you leave to grow and what you remove. You do this by where you choose to place your focus and attention, and what attitude you choose to make your own.

If you constantly concentrate on the things that seem negative or unpleasant, or on what you don’t have, you are nourishing negative seeds. These negative seeds grow and thrive, choking out other things attempting to grow in the same space.

If you choose to focus on the positive things with a heart of gratitude, these will be the seeds that take root and grow.

Staying focused with a wholehearted attitude is the best way to ensure you live a happy life without regret. The easiest way to do this is to practice self-reflection regularly and make small changes when you seem to lose your grateful heart.

It may sound simple, but intend to grab every opportunity to smile instead of frown. Give instead of take, and see life through the eyes of gratefulness whenever you can.



WHAT TO DO NEXT

I hope this has been helpful in revealing how useful and powerful reflection and gratitude are—not to mention the resulting insights and practical wisdom that also arise.

If you'd like to learn more, please go to www.RaginiMichaels.com. Check out the video on the *Psychology Of The Mystics*. That project resulted in a fascinating and powerful on-line training called *Centered 24-7 – Leading From The Eye Of The Storm*. You can learn more about that at www.CenteredNoMatterWhat.com

I hope you have enjoyed this eBook and will put some of its offerings into practice in your daily life. If you'd like to contact me for private coaching or to explore any of my online courses, go to www.RaginiMichaels.com or schedule a complementary 30 minute private call at www.Calendly.com/rm--10/30min