

Give Yourself the Gift of Gratitude

By Elle Garfield, ACSW, CAAC, LP

Looking for that perfect holiday gift for family or friends? How about treating yourself? Wouldn't you like to have something that will delight you and give you a warm comforting feeling any time? Well you can and you don't have to bother with your checkbook or credit card. There is no charge and it's always available to you at any time. What's the catch, you say? You will have to stop rushing around frantically, take a deep breath and put some effort into a practice of gratitude.

That's right this wonderful gift was inside you all the time. Gratitude will change your perspective and your life. When you are seeing the glass as half empty, insert gratitude and ta-da you are seeing a glass half full. When you are feeling grateful it's hard if not impossible to also feel bad about yourself or your circumstances.

How can you practice gratitude when you don't feel very grateful? Incorporating some elements of the ancient practice of yoga into your life often leads to a feeling of gratitude. When you are practicing yoga you become aware of what you have, what supports you and how you are connected to everything else. You are tapping into the underlying stream of joy that runs through everything. But don't think you have to step on to your mat to practice gratitude.

The holidays are a great time to use gratitude as a tool to relieve stress. With the many things on your "to-do" list and the limitations of time and life in general, stress is at an all time high. Taking a moment to step back from all the frantic activity to consider what you have to be grateful for can be a relief and get you back on track to realizing what's most important. It doesn't matter who you are or what you have been through, everyone can find something to be grateful for, even if it's as basic as being able to breath and being alive.

Sometimes even things that are difficult or frustrating can turn out to be something you feel grateful for. Although it may take effort to look for it there usually is a silver lining to every cloud. The more you notice the more you get a glimpse of a bigger picture. For example, if your power goes out it's only natural to feel frustration, disappointment even anger or fear that what helps us to survive and thrive is cut off. This seemingly hard situation can be an opportunity to see and be grateful for the many things we all have a tendency to take for granted daily. It can also be an opportunity to slow down and enjoy more simple pleasures like candle light and reading a book by the fireplace.

To get the most benefits, practice gratitude every day. Just spending a few minutes upon rising or before you go to bed bringing to mind a few things you are grateful for or even better yet writing down the five things you are most grateful for in a gratitude journal can change your perspective, helping you to tap into the joy that is always there.

So remember, when the stress of the holidays or unexpected events cause you to feel frustrated and wondering what there is to be happy about, you have something inside that will change your attitude for the better. Give yourself the gift of gratitude and watch your joy expand.

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