

Gratitude is one practice that can make an enormous difference in people's lives. Rather than thinking about gratitude as woo or a 'flaky new age practice' it is important to recognize that the beneficial aspects of practicing gratitude are well documented. Scientifically, we know the practice of gratitude works and works exceedingly well! It has a strong neurological basis in that in time it transforms the wiring of our brains. In doing so it helps us gain a much more positive outlook on life as well as improving the way we look at ourselves.

The most common way people practice gratitude is to have the thought "I am grateful for..." It is a very cognitive approach to gratitude and to be frank a highly limiting one. A positive way to think about this approach, is that it is a step in the right direction - a step is better than nothing. We can simultaneously be grateful for this step and improve upon this step.

Try and think about gratitude as trying to tap into an immersive experience. Instead of thinking about gratitude, we want to experience gratitude! In order to achieve this state, we need to bring in an emotional component and a physical component. It is important to feel gratitude. Our hearts have to be open in order to feel gratitude. When we feel gratitude, it is impossible to feel stress or fear... Gratitude is very important.

Equally it is important to recognize how gratefulness feels in the body. Where is gratefulness located in the body? What does it feel like at a physical level? How big or small is it? Is it round, square or some other shape? As best as you can try to really hone in on the physical sensation of gratitude.

If we can match the thought with the emotion and the physical sensation it makes for a powerful experience of gratitude! It is the experience of gratitude which can make a great deal of difference in our lives. Only thinking about gratitude is like using 1 cylinder of an 8-cylinder engine. We really want to be using all 8 cylinders as much as possible.

The next thing we need to pay attention to is what we do with the gratitude. It is not enough to experience gratitude. We also need to act on it!

If we are grateful to someone express it. Actively demonstrate your gratitude. We can also engage in random acts of kindness. These acts are excellent ways of expressing gratitude. Most importantly we can express gratitude to ourselves. Often this is harder for people to do than express it as towards another person. With practice and dedication, we can develop a gratefulness orientation to ourselves just as we could for another person.

One of the reasons we want to act on the experience is that it creates an atmosphere of living gratitude - we are literally creating a living positive energy in our lives. It is this energy which enlivens us and our relationships. Have you ever been around kids that are happy and laughing? It is contagious! They are spreading energy. It is the same type of energy we want to spread around in our lives because it creates a fantastic feedback loop of positivity.

Finally, a practice of gratitude requires practice. Gratitude should be something we practice every day. Intermittent gratitude does not help us that much. What we are interested in or at least should be, is changing our mindsets so that our minds are much less disturbed. This requires a little discipline as a daily or nightly exercise. Personally, I recommend getting into gratitude first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Both are important because one sets the tone for the coming day and the other consolidates important aspects of gratitude which permeate our lives.

Like many things the practice of gratitude becomes easier the more we practice it. But we do have to be persistent and tenacious in our practice until it becomes a natural part of us.

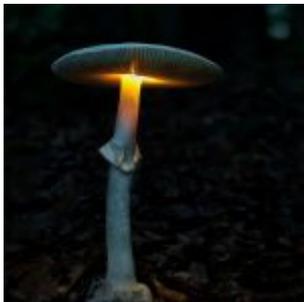
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