Gratitude Ceremony

Overview

< Ask everyone to turn off phones, to settle and close eyes before reading. >

I should be happier. Why aren't I feeling happy?
I should be stronger. Why aren't I feeling strong?
I should be more productive. Why aren't I reaching my full potential?
I should have better relationships. Why are my relationships lacking?
I should be more motivated. Why don't I feel strongly passionate about anything?

Gratitude, Appreciation, Thanks. These are powerful ideas that are at the core of your ability to focus and to express yourself. Enlightenment is: Persistent appreciation regardless of your circumstances. By practising exercises which focus on giving thanks and amplifying your gratitude you will develop the internal attitude and perspective to solve all your inner frustrations. This Gratitude Ceremony will walk you through various exercises that will amplify your gratitude and give you some personal practice to take away and cultivate. Anyone can take this ceremony and facilitate the practice by following these instructions.

We meet every Sunday to facilitate a Gratitude Ceremony and thus teach rituals of gratefulness.

<u>Schedule 1 hour and 30 minutes</u>

Ceremony Open (10 mins)

Circle of Thanks (15 mins)

Poor me pout (15 mins)

Friend Swap (15 mins)

Thanks Mantra (5 mins)

Earth Blessing (5 mins)

Gratitude Nidra (15 mins)

Thankyou Universe (5 mins)

Ceremony Close (5 mins)

Ceremony Open (10 mins)

Everybody sits in a circle with closed eyes while somebody reads the following.

A Ceremony is a collection of rituals. A ritual is a regular practice performed intentionally. The difference between a habit and a ritual is that a habit is incidental without regard to intent. Whereas a ritual is a tool to focus ourselves upon a particular practice. A ceremony is a class teaching rituals of a similar intention. So today our Gratitude Ceremony is about cultivating some gratitude rituals that you can integrate into your daily routines.

Gratitude involves us in seeing and respecting the source of our values. Its important because it clarifies one's values. And taking things for granted is the biggest spiritual and physical mistake you can make. Taking things for granted causes you to lose things you love and things you need. It can be a terribly expensive lesson to learn. Gratitude is the antidote to many dysfunctional behaviours. Gratitude amplifies Awareness, Compassion, Vigilance and Discipline. It amplifies Awareness because it requires introspection on the source of your values and so puts you into the present moment and in this way gratitude demands truth seeking. It amplifies Compassion because it instantly contrasts the haves with the have nots. It amplifies Vigilance and Discipline because once values are recognised there is a passion to protect and nurture their source.

These are powerful ideas that at the core of your ability to focus and to express yourself. By practising exercises which focus on giving thanks and amplifying your gratitude you will develop the internal attitude and perspective to solve all your inner frustrations.

I should be happier. Why aren't I feeling happy?
When you give thanks, you think carefully about the things you value and happiness is just a side effect.
I should be stronger. Why aren't I feeling strong?
When you give thanks, you see and protect important relationships that are symbiotic.
I should be more productive. Why aren't I reaching my full potential?
When you reflect upon the value of yourself only then can you understand all your power and potential.
I should have better relationships. Why are my relationships lacking?
When you meditate on the people around you then you see the symbiosis you share.
I should be more motivated. Why don't I feel strongly passionate about anything?
When you fully appreciate yourself your passion is aroused because hidden opportunities become visible.

These are spiritual issues but gratitude also heals physical issues. How many of us came to appreciate a certain part of our body only after it was injured? Its easier to find gratitude after suffering. But if we cultivate gratitude first we can develop compassion in the absence of suffering. This is really important: compassion in the absence of suffering. Its an alternative strategy to 'trial and error'. The problem with trial and error is that you have to pay for the errors. But if you cultivate 'compassion in the absence of suffering' you more easily foresee errors and so you avoid suffering and progress swiftly in peace.

It's through appreciating your legs now or your back or whatever that the subtle choices of your subconscious shift to invest the time and forethought toward preventing an injury or properly nursing an injury. So be mindful of all your body functions that can be easily taken for granted. Listen to your small pains. If you are suffering be mindful of your illness and consider its needs and be grateful for the pain and the awareness and passion for healing it brings.

Enlightenment is: Persistent appreciation regardless of your circumstances. You have heard about the rich man who cannot feel satisfied. While some poor man feels joy everyday. What is the difference there? Gratitude. The rich man has every material thing but if he doesn't appreciate things then he feels like he has nothing. The poor man who is grateful for every relationship, every meal, a sunny day always feels strong. What makes you feel strong are the rituals of appreciation, daily practices that force you to contemplate what you DO have in the now. To contemplate what success you have already achieved. And if you don't feel successful then you don't appreciate enough because just being alive now is a success.

Contemplating the success of your living is powerful. The body you have, the time you have, the peace around you where you may still your mind and focus your intentions. This is a powerful mixture and you can achieve so much with small daily practices of gratitude.

Persistent appreciation regardless of your circumstances. Because we all have our excuses. In 5 seconds I can put together a list a 100 items with my personal complaints to the universe if I want to feel sorry for myself. And they always seem so serious to me to the person feeling them. And I've done that before and I realised self pity is a dead end road. Self pity is the root of all depression. There is no fruit at the end of that road except the tiredness of feeling sorry for yourself. Feeling sorry for yourself just stresses you or makes you shout or shrivel reducing your abilities. So its a dangerous feedback loop: Step 1) You feel sorry for yourself Step 2) Your performance is reduced so things don't get fixed or get worse so you feel sorry for yourself again back to Step 1. This downward spiral only slows you down and hinders your progress. "Poor me talk" means you’re taking yourself too seriously. So we need to develop tricks that help us let go when self pity takes hold.

Stress and shouting are sometimes useful though. If there is an immediate emergency to attend to like a car accident or someone needs CPR right away. But my rule is if there is no blood then there is no excuse for shouting and if there is no injustice there is no need for stress. Your taking life too seriously. Time for some gratitude practice.

Rituals

Circle of Thanks (15 mins)

The purpose of this exercise is to hear what other people appreciate because we often have ingrained patterns of appreciation so listening to other people give thanks is a good way to find new things to appreciate that we have been taking for granted.

Sit in a circle. For example first person says: Thanks for flowers that 1)....2) or ....3)..... then the next person says Thanks for flowers because 1) ….. Just one thing. And the next person does the same. Then everybody says Thankyou Flowers. Then the next person starts again. For example: 1) Thanks for the sun that gives me warmth 2) that gives us light 3) that makes the flowers grow 4) thankyou sun! Everybody says Thankyou Sun. If there is time pass through each person and ask them to share 3 things they are grateful for and why.

Poor me pout (15 mins)

The purpose of this ritual is to practice mocking yourself as a tool for helping you to let go and escape the poor me downward spiral. This is where you crush the powerless behavioural mode of depression. A perspective of comedy puts the tragedy (by force of laughter!) into a smaller perspective. This changes the dynamic of ones attitude from sulking to light-heartedness and clarity. A bit of silly fun to help you to take yourself and life less seriously and with more humour. As a personal exercise during the week if you ever feel frustrated go take a look in the mirror and take a look at yourself. Try out the poor me pout and think to yourself “maybe I'm taking myself too seriously?”. I do this myself whenever I feel sorry for myself, I stare in the mirror pout my lip and say. “Awww poor James.... :(“ and then I laugh it off and the self pity vanishes.

So we make two circles one inside the other or just. Everybody will first close their eyes. Those on the inside circle think up some poor me chatter : Why does this have to happen to me? This always happens to me.
Why can't I get what I want!? Nothing works out for me. It's not fair! etc. etc. poor me!

Now everybody make your best sad face, poor me pout. Stick out your bottom lip and make a sad face. And freeze that face! Now on the count of 3 everybody keeping your sad face say out loud: "Awwww poor me!". And now everyone see if you can look into your partners face without laughing!

Friend Swap (15 mins)

Everybody thinks of a friend or family member and meditate on why you are grateful for having that person in your life. Also think about how you are related to that person. Like maybe ‘friend from work’ or ‘a brother’ or ‘uncle’s best friend’ not their actual name but how you are related. One person is selected to share with the group the relationship kind and why they are grateful. Then next person takes the same relation, so if it was ‘sister’ first I would think about my sister and share why I am grateful for her. Then I go on to share the original person I was thinking. And the person after me will take the kind of relationship I used on my original and then do the same. We each tell the group about two people and why we are grateful for them.

Thanks Mantra (5 mins)

The purpose of this exercise is to practice a persistent appreciation regardless of what random stuff is going on around you. I like to do this one in the shower because i just love warm water and can't thank it enough.

Still lying down, repeating the mantra "Thankyou Thankyou Thankyou" quietly. Whatever you see wherever your mind lands give thanks regardless of what it is. Occasionally someone will shout out a random word. Give thanks to what arises in your mind. Observe and consider your response to the word but keep on repeating the mantra. If your mind thinks something negative and you think you should NOT be grateful for such a thing, like genocide for example, then consider the compassionate perspective cultivate your compassion by reaching your heart out to those suffering and be grateful you are free and powerful to help with the solution.

0:30 stick	0:60 fire	1:30 pencil	2:00 toes	2:30 computer
3:00 smoke	3:30 brick	4:00 knife	4:30 meadow	

Earth Blessing (5 mins)

First touching our hands to the earth, we thank our mother for all that she brings, nature, food and for holding us. Then raising our hands high, we thank our father sky for opening up to us, for the air we breath, the wind and the stars in the night sky. And touching our heads, we bring all the good things we receive into our thoughts. And into our hearts. And to our inner fire.

Our hands reach outward as we give thanks to everyone out there. Our hands reaching inwards into our circle as we give thanks for our friends here and now. And with our hands together in prayer we centre ourselves and we give silent thanks for things personal to us. And all together as one we join hands and we pray that we get what we need. All together as one.

Gratitude Nidra (15 mins)

The purpose of this exercise is to appreciate yourself and your existence starting with your body. Sit with eyes closed and quietly think about each part of your body. Together we give thanks to each part and send it some attention, love and admiration.

Sometimes this meditation brings up sadness along with gratitude, especially if you find yourself thinking about things that your body no longer can do with ease. You may also find yourself feeling critical of some part of your body. Let these emotions and thoughts come and go without grasping on to them or rejecting them. Even as they arise out of habit, you can choose to return to the gratitude reflection. Pain is a messenger that we can give thanks for. It motivates us to give more attention, more love and more truth seeking. Embrace this dimension of any pain you might feel.

See detailed practice below.

Thankyou Universe (5 mins)

The purpose of this is to practice a thankyou prayer that you should send out to the universe everyday before sleep or when you wake up in the morning. A quiet thanks giving prayer for the universe. Close your eyes and start with "Universe thankyou for ...." and keep going for 3 minutes, think of every person, every object your surrounded by, think of your past teachers, or family, or experiences that you had; whatever. Dwell upon each thing in good time and really swim in admiration and appreciation. Give your personal thanks to the Universe for anything you can think of and each time you do it make the list of things a little different. If you find it hard to find things to say thankyou for that's a red flag that your suffering from Efkaristofinitis which means you need to cultivate your background gratitude processing and make your own Gratitude Ceremony! Finish off your prayer with Thankyou Universe!

Ceremony Close

In closing let us consider the method by which gratitude brings us symbiosis with the people around us. Symbiosis is a word that describes a win-win exchange. When a bird sits on a cows back and eats the fleas that is symbiosis. When a goat eats an apple the seed of the apple is carried far - that's the mission of the apple tree solved with the opportunity of symbiosis. Every time you voluntarily pay for something that is symbiosis in your market place. You are surrounded by symbiotic relationships. Consider each one of them carefully since they are critical to your life.

Each of us are surrounded by huge opportunities that would excite us and spark a fire of passion if we knew about them. But we never see them because we don't spend time appreciating our current circumstance and giving thanks to ourselves as we are today. You are surrounded right now by all the tools of your wildest dreams. They are right at your finger tips but its a creativity crises if you don't see how to combine them. The solution to see these opportunities is to apply the antidote which is: daily Gratitude practices.

So here is a possible schedule for the practices we did today.

1. Set your alarm 10 minutes early, wake up and perform a Thanks Nidra for your body will carry you into the coming day.
2. In the shower while your thinking of your day keep a quiet "Thankyou, thankyou, thankyou" mantra going.
3. During the day notice the circle of your symbiosis occurring with other objects and people and give thanks to some of them especially those you've taken more for granted recently.
4. If you feel down or get stressed during the day go find a mirror in the bath room and perform a "Poor me pout" on yourself.
5. Think about other people in your life and how important it is to develop and nurture long term friendships. Take personal responsibility for the outcomes you are faced with. Find pride in your time of strength such that it reaches out to please and serve others as well. Share a burden with someone so they do not face it alone.
6. When you see the sunshine or the moon, think about the natural world, the earth, the trees, the water that nurtures your body and soul. Get closer to nature and give thanks to what's going on outside the human domain to support your life. Nature works wonders to distill into order and peacefulness so that you may sleep sound tonight.
7. At the end of the day before sleeping say a "Thankyou Universe" prayer to give thanks for your day and your existence.

I learn so much about deeper ways I can feel gratitude by doing this in a group with you all. And we are all getting this benefit from each other, so to close this Gratitude Ceremony it would be appropriate then that we give each other a personal thank you for coming and for sharing your energy today.

Gratitude Nidra Notes

After a few minutes of conscious breathing, you will have greater control on your attention span. Notice a tingling sensation that seems to follow your attention, and bring your full awareness to it. The tingling sensation is so important in body awareness. It represents your mind-body connection. This is a source for awareness, relief and healing. Bring your attention to it over and over again to amplify it. As we pass through each part of the body think about it and feel it tingle then ask yourself:

How has this part of my body supported me in life?
How has it allowed me to engage in life?
What has this area of your body done today?

Lower Body Awareness

Start feeling your toes, heals, and arches in whatever position they are currently in. Wow! How amazing your feet are! So many tiny bones, connecting you to the earth and giving you the power to walk, to run, to dance and supporting you through every step of your life! Wow give thanks to your feet!

Next, lead your attention up the legs, through the ankle and the calves. Stay there for a moment and breathe into the calves. Feel the blood flowing in your lower legs, and then bring your attention upward to the knees. Stay in your knees and feel them tingle with relief. What if you had a pain in your knee everyday you had to deal with? And what if you don't? Give thanks to you knees, ankles and calves.

Upper Body Awareness

Follow the path upwards through the thighs and focus astutely in your hips. Allow the tingling sensation to emanate throughout the hips and buttocks. Move your awareness upward and inward to massage the internal organs that work so hard to keep you healthy. Take time to feel into your stomach.

Slowly move your feeling into each organ and just sit with each one. Try to notice them and give thanks to each of them for what they do. What do you know about them? Who are they and why are these organs so organized to help you in the way they do? Is their any pain coming from one of them? Move your attention over each one and offer them relief with your attention and gratitude. Give thanks and promise yourself to learn more about each of them.

Now move your attention upward around the chest. Sense the lungs and breathe deeply. Sense the beating of the heart and bring your full attention to this beautiful masterpiece. Try to feel the movement of your beating heart. Consider that your heart here, this is a source of life, working for your constantly. Give thanks for that effort. Take a deep breath as you give thanks to your heart. Right here, right now, you and your heart. Be still, and be at peace. No where to go, no where to be…

The heart literally fuels the entire body moving oxygen to every cell in the body. In this way the heart supports every action you've ever taken. You might thank your heart for giving the opportunity to experience each moment of your life. The heart sings with joy, expands with love, and pounds with excitement. You might feel gratitude to the heart for allowing you to experience each of these emotions.

As you follow your awareness up your shoulders a relaxing neck a deep breath in and out and down your arms melting into your elbows. Slowly notice how gentle and light your wrists, hands and fingers feel.

They are delicate and beautiful. Allow the awareness of your arms to wash freely over you.

As your attention creeps up the neck, bring it through your jaw to your lips and mouth. A dormant still tongue lets the jaw and face totally relax. Sit in pure silence and stillness as you feel the sensation of having a relaxed face. Feel the tingling on your cheeks and let the muscles of the cheeks and the mouth relax and sit back with gravity. Give thanks to each. Next, follow the tingling to the nose and again feel the sensation of the breath as it travels in and out of the nostrils. Give thanks to your magical ears. Go to the eyes and allow your awareness to spread appreciation for your vision. Go behind the eyes and to the top of the head and feel the brain working and sense its vibrational frequencies. Feel the sensation of your entire head hard at work, in silence, observing it.

Full Body Awareness

Once your attention has travelled from toes to head, get a sense of the entire body. Loop it from toes to the tip of the head. Feel everything all at once and spread the tingling of awareness throughout the wonderful organism in which you live. Feel your life force beating, bubbling, breathing and flowing within you.

Finish this practice by bringing your awareness back to your breath. Place your hands somewhere on the body where you can feel the movement of your breath. Repeat to yourself, “Thank you for this breath. Thank you for this moment.”

Give thanks with loving kindness for everything your body does for you. Say thank you again and again.