

Gratitude

A powerful way that we can access, or begin to access, the Divine is through gratitude.

Gratitude is a powerful practice because it strips away all our arguments with the way Life should be. When we're grateful for something, we can't be partially ungrateful. We can't hold anything in reserve. We can't say, "I'm grateful for my partner, but I really wish he/she would be more helpful around the house." It doesn't work that way. Gratitude is binary: you are either grateful or you are not.

Gratitude only works if it's wholehearted.

We can start off with easy things. For example, we can be grateful that it's a sunny, beautiful day outside. Over time, we can work up to being grateful for things that have been difficult in our lives. This can be very transformative because it takes away all our objections about what happened. When we take away our argument with Life, we actually come into alignment with Life itself. We're no longer standing in opposition to it. With consistent acknowledgment of the many things for which we are grateful in our lives, we can learn to be grateful for everything we've ever experienced: both the good times and the difficult times.

I'm not suggesting that we fake gratitude for things that we don't actually feel grateful for. Pretending to be something that we are not is counter-productive. Rather, I am suggesting that we can learn to see the benefit to ourselves of even the most challenging events.

I find it quite remarkable that when you ask someone about the most transformative periods of their life, they'll often talk about things that were very difficult for them. Perhaps a difficult breakup, loss of a job, death of a loved one, or a severe illness. Although they wouldn't choose to relive those experiences, they will often admit that those same experiences were the most transformative of their life – a point where their perspective about Life shifted significantly.

We do our best to avoid that which is most transformative. Interesting!

When we look back on difficult experiences in our own life, are we willing to be grateful for them? Are we willing to admit that we learned something from them that we wouldn't have otherwise learned? Do we acknowledge the transformative effect the event has had on our life? Are we able to see that we wouldn't have the wisdom that we have today had those events not happened?

In other words, can we be grateful no matter what? Can we be receptive to whatever Life has to offer?

As I said, we can practice on the small things first. We can then work towards more mixed or more challenging events.

To practice gratitude fully, it's necessary that we don't just think about it in the muddle of our own mind. Because there are usually so many other thoughts twirling around in our heads, the Universe has a hard time sorting out what we really mean and what we don't.

An effective practice of gratitude is to either write down what you're grateful for or say it out loud with sincerity. Both ways of expressing gratitude have power. And, of course, consistency counts. Daily practice can remind us of all the everyday things that we can be grateful for.

Don't wait until times are tough and you need some help. Make it a daily practice. Maybe when you first get up in the morning or when you're having your morning cup of coffee or tea, you could just write down (or say aloud) three or four things that you're grateful for in that moment. They don't have to be big things. Doing this practice helps us to realize that there is value in everything that has ever happened to us. We can be grateful unreservedly.

We can work our way up to being grateful for the more challenging things that are happening. We can be grateful in the sense that, "this person who has caused me great difficulty also caused me to grow, to gain maturity and to evoke compassion." So, we can be grateful for challenging things as well.

Perhaps we can even learn to feel gratitude when there is no object in particular that is causing the gratitude!

Practicing being grateful is a way of coming into alignment with Life itself, because we're not arguing with however Life presents itself. When we take a stance in opposition to Life, we're putting ourselves in a position of, "me against Life; me against the whole of existence; me against the Universe." Joe versus the volcano! It's really our argument with what is. When we are willing to drop that argument, we begin to come into alignment with Life. And there can be a sense of gratitude about that: gratitude for all the unique lessons that Life has presented to us for our benefit. Without the lessons, there'd be very little motivation for change. Without the challenges, there'd be very little reason to grow in our understanding or maturity.

Therefore, we can be grateful for the good things and the difficult things too.

Gratitude is a very powerful practice to bring us into alignment with Life. Gratitude erodes our sense of being separate from Life. It can bring us into a sense of Oneness with Life, which is really an essential aspect of this spiritual journey. To feel at home in this body, in this world, in this Life with all our imperfections, as is, is an immense freedom and joy.

Gratitude can be a valuable practice to take us further on that journey of discovery. My sense is that if we could be wholeheartedly grateful for everything that has ever happened to us, for all those old boyfriends, for all the embarrassments we suffered, for our parents or lack thereof, and for all the difficulties yet to come and if we could remain in that sense of complete gratitude for even 24 hours, we could not avoid awakening.