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A YEAR OF MINDFUL MAGAZINE

A Mindfulness Guide for Complex Times







Turn Toward Gratitude



Gratitude is more than a practice it's a lens through which we can see the world. It can imbue your life with a little more optimism, more

resilience, and can help you make healthier choices.

That's what science says. But I wouldn't be surprised to learn that you already know that. You may already know the way that gratitude feels in your body—a suffusion of warmth, a feeling of expanding brightness in your chest maybe, or a volley of starbursts of delight in your mind. You may already have noticed that gratitude begets gratitude—you feel it once, and you tend to want to feel it again, and to share the feeling, giving others an opportunity to feel gratitude as well.

And if you've picked up this Gratitude Journal (thank you! We loved making it for you, and are so grateful you've chosen to spend time with it!), then you likely want to make an exploration of the role gratitude is playing in your life.

In these pages, you'll find the latest scientific thinking about gratitude and how it supports us, our relationships, our communities, and our world. You'll also find essays from people playing with

how gratitude shows up for them. You'll find meditations from some of the foremost teachers of mindfulness, so you can create a habit of gratitude. And you'll find prompts so you can use writing and drawing to further explore how gratitude feels, where it arises, and what it means to you.

As a writer and editor, I'm definitely biased toward writing as a way to see what's going on. I kept a journal-obsessively-from the time I was about eleven years old. Writing about my life, my thoughts, my experiences, and my dreams helped me find myself on the page. Story was my orientation, and putting aside time every day to sort through what I was thinking, feeling, and experiencing helped me make sense of my life, and to see how and who I was becoming. What I've learned over the years is that gratitude can be an orientation, too—a way of being in the world. On behalf of the Gratitude Gang here at Mindful who made this journal for you, may the warm feeling of gratitude accompany you on every page-and into every day.

Gratefully,

Stephanie Domet
Managing Editor,
Mindful magazine and mindful.org

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY SNEJANA SITYAEVA / ADOBE STOCK, SECTION OPENER ILLUSTRATIONS BY GERALDINE SY

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Deepen your gratitude practice with mindful writing prompts by Jane Anne Staw

- Explore audio guided meditations on mindful.org
- Let your creativity shine with a moment of mindful coloring



mindful.org/mindful-writing

A Habit Worth Creating

Gratitude practice is a celebration: not just of what we have, but of everything that shapes and connects us all.

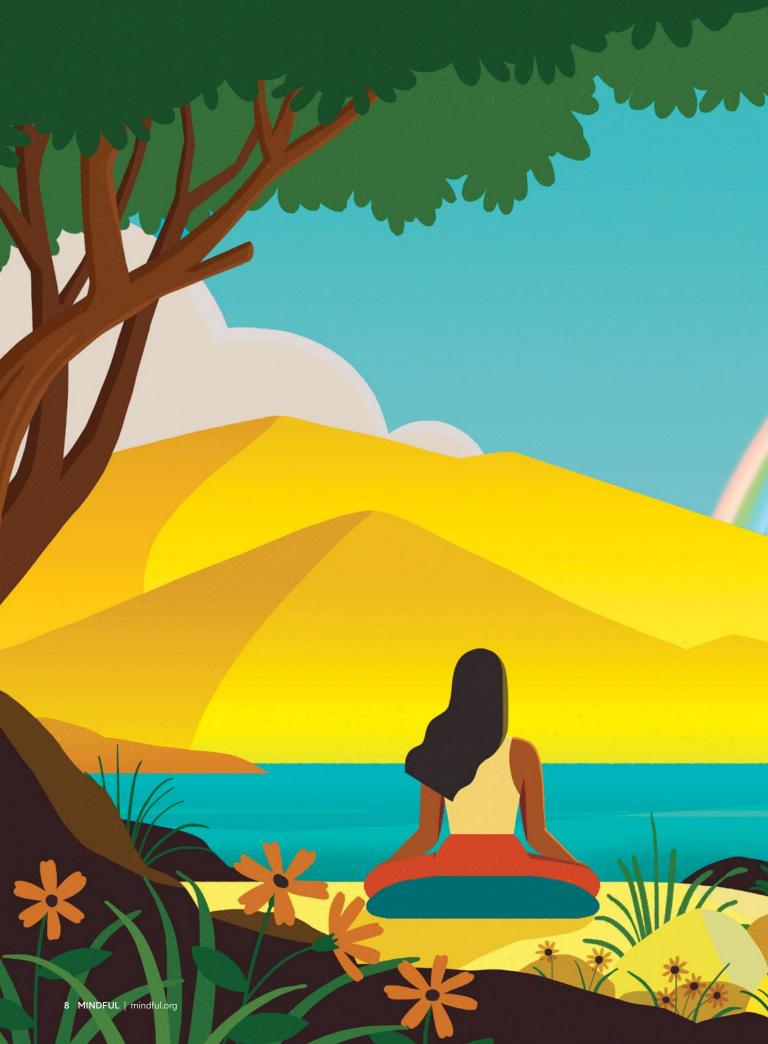
by MISTY PRATT

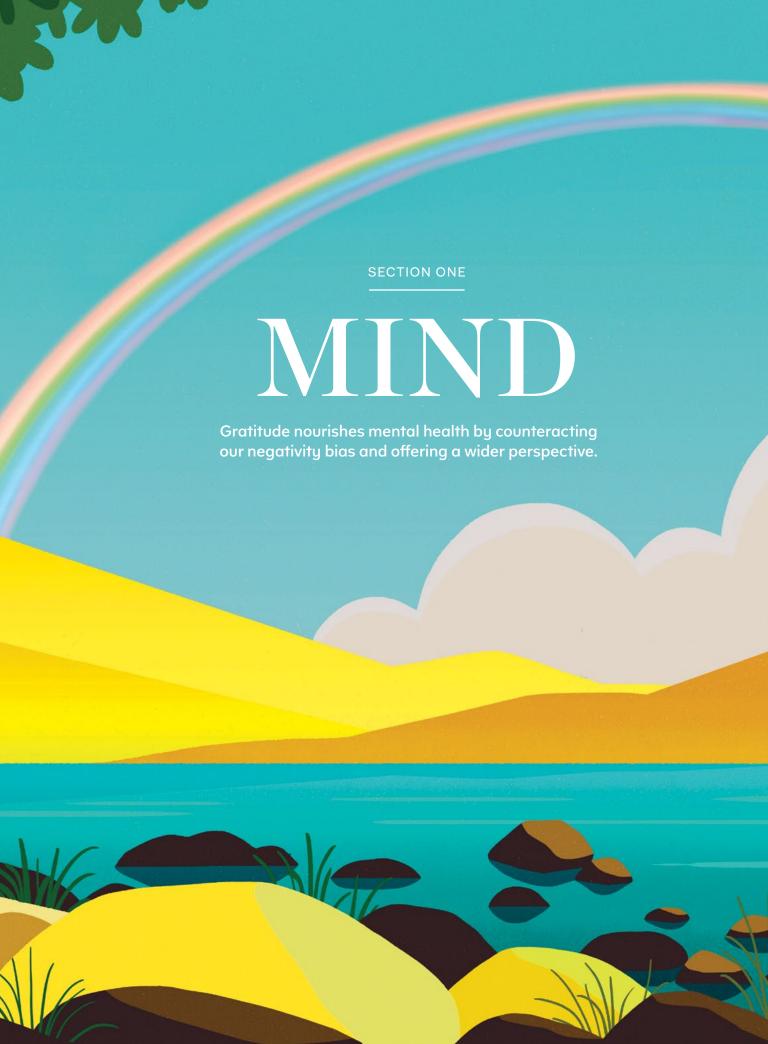
Gratitude offers us a way of embracing all that makes our lives what they are. More than just a happy feeling for the parts of our lives currently going our way, gratitude encompasses the willingness to expand our attention so that we perceive more of the goodness we are always receiving—often, without even asking—from sources and people beyond ourselves, and then acting on the appreciation we feel by paying it forward.

In the past two decades, a growing body of evidence in the field of social science has found that gratitude has measurable benefits for just about every area of our lives. Gratitude appears to contribute substantially to individual well-being and physical health. So much so that the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley—a leader in research on the science of social and emotional well-being—describes gratitude as the "social glue" key to building and nurturing strong relationships.

Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, and one of the world's leading experts on the science of gratitude, defines gratitude as having two parts. The first is an affirmation of goodness: People can learn to wake up to the good around them and notice the gifts they have received. The second part of gratitude is recognizing that the source of this goodness rests outside of oneself-that we receive these gifts from other people, and sometimes from a higher power, fate, or the natural world. This contrasts with the dominant culture in North America and some other parts of the world, which assumes that an individual is entirely responsible for their own success. Gratitude busts this myth by helping people realize that they wouldn't be where they are without the help of others.

With this gratitude journal, you'll be supported in forming the habit of practicing gratitude and making it a daily feature in your life. With consistent practice over time, gratitude will boost your health, strengthen your relationships, and lead you to experience a greater sense of compassionate connection to everyone and everything around you—not to mention help you feel happier!





titudo thatth BRENÉ BROWN

Cup Half Full?

By cultivating gratitude, you give your mind a powerful tool for emphasizing the good, suffusing your life with a greater sense of well-being.

by MISTY PRATT

Gratitude is more than just a momentary good feeling.

Scientists studying written gratitude interventions, such as gratitude letters or journals, have found benefits for mental health and wellbeing. Gratitude also appears to help you to feel more satisfied in life and can boost self-esteem, according to peer-reviewed research. Here are some science-backed ways that gratitude supports a healthy mind.

THE SCIENCE **Happiness Boost**

In one study with nearly 300 adults seeking counseling at a university, one randomized group wrote a gratitude letter each week for three weeks. This group reported significantly better mental health (compared to the control group) at follow-up, 12 weeks after the last writing exercise. Another type of written gratitude practice is counting blessings, or "Three Good Things." A study of this practice found that people who wrote down three things that had gone well in their day and identified the causes of those good things were significantly happier and less depressed. even six months after study's end.

HOW IT WORKS Strengthen **Positive Recall**

How exactly do these practices improve our mental well-being? In general, people are more cognitively aware of their "headwinds" (barriers they face) than "tailwinds" (benefits they receive). By paying more attention to our tailwinds, studies show that we can accentuate feelings of happiness, optimism, and positive emotion.

"Strengthening your positive recall bias makes it easier to see the good things around you even when times are dark," says Nancy Davis Kho, author of The Thank You Project: Cultivating Happiness One Letter of Gratitude at a Time. Nancy set a lofty goal of writing fifty thank you letters, and found that the practice improved her ability to weather some of life's bigger challenges.

At first, Nancy found it difficult to come up with a list of 50 people. After getting started on the letters, the practice naturally boosted positive emotion and she was able to extend her gratitude beyond family and friends. Nancy encourages those writing gratitude letters to find "the creative people whose work carries you beyond yourself,

whose vision helps you clarify your own, whose talent and hard work have combined to create a body of work that brings you simple joy."

WHY PRACTICE? **Deepen Resilience**

Practicing gratitude doesn't require you to ignore or stifle negative emotions. In The Gratitude Project: How the Science of Thankfulness Can Rewire Our Brains for Resilience, Optimism, and the Greater Good, Robert Emmons writes that "practicing gratitude magnifies positive feelings more than it reduces negative feelings." Gratitude helps you to see the bigger picture and stay resilient in the face of adversity.

In researching the science of gratitude for her book, Nancy chatted with Christine Carter, Senior Fellow at the Greater Good Science Center. "She said that the message that The Thank You Project could help convey is how important it is to let yourself feel the sad stuff too; you're not going to get stuck there," says Nancy. Indeed, research shows navigating adversity with a greater sense of gratitude can improve emotional well-being, even months after a difficult event has passed.



Living Large

Taking the time to appreciate little moments of beauty and connection can transform our lives—and our relationship with the world—one small encounter at a time.

by JANE ANNE STAW

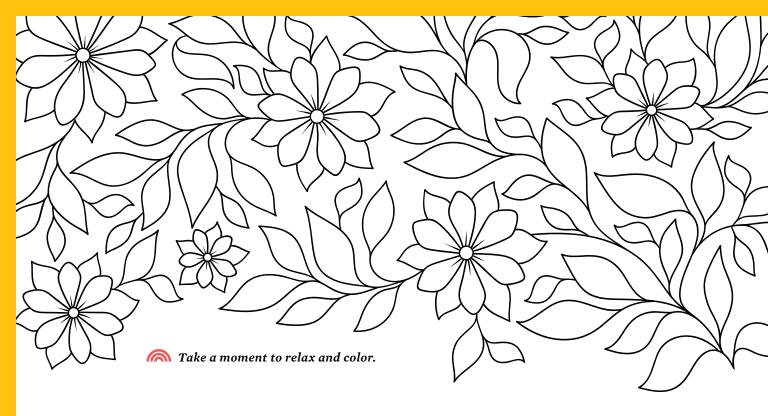
It was an ordinary day. Midafternoon, I took my dog for her usual walk around the block, mind on remedies for the writing class I was to teach that evening. While I was known for the community that usually formed in my classes, this semester was an exception. I had already tried several strategies for bringing the students together, but so far nothing had worked.

In those days-before mindfulness was mainstream—I was always worried about something: my teaching, an essay I was writing, my granddaughters, my garden, a recent conversation with a friend. It didn't take much to turn the anxiety faucet on, and once flowing, it could pull most areas of my life into its current.

About halfway around the block that afternoon, I happened to glance down and notice a dried sycamore leaf curled gracefully on the pavement. It wasn't the first time I'd seen a dried sycamore leaf. Giant sycamores line the verges of our Berkeley neighborhood. But that afternoon, instead of just noticing, I stopped to appreciate. The leaf looked so beautiful, poised in its balletic position, curled gracefully upward, its stem extending for several inches, rooting it on the sidewalk. I stood for several minutes noticing the leaf's fragility, its crispness, its delicacy. Then I continued my walk around the block.

When I arrived home ten minutes later, I realized that the happiness that had infused me as I gazed at the sycamore leaf was still with me. I had stopped worrying about my class-and nothing else to feel anxious about had taken its place. This is quite amazing, I thought. I've never experienced anything like this before. Something so small sustaining my happiness. In an instant, I realized that I might inadvertently have discovered something important. Transformative! And I decided to try to replicate my experience.

I was so excited that in a flash I had a name for what I had done. and made a commitment to practicing small for an entire year. And since I'm a writer, I decided to write about my experiences. That was the beginning: an ordinary →



day on a routine walk that suddenly morphed into the portal to a new way of living my life.

I began my practice by tuning in whenever I noticed something beautiful. I quickly realized that it wasn't spectacular beauty that made me the happiest. Instead, it was the small moments of unexpected beauty that sent a rush of happiness through me. Moments that I discovered on my own and that others might overlook. It might be a bit of rust on a pipe, a smudge on the sidewalk, a flower petal cradled in a leaf, raised grain on a piece of weathered wood, the graceful drape of a curtain in a living room, the gentle curve of a ceramic bowl.

TURN TOWARD BEAUTY

I had certainly never been blind to beauty. And I had most definitely remarked on it before. But the afternoon I noticed the dried sycamore leaf, I had stopped to admire it, turning my mind away from the subject of my anxiety to an object of beauty right in front of me. That interlude allowed me to take in fully

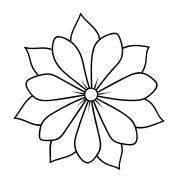
what I was seeing. Gazing at the leaf, it was as if I had sipped a happiness elixir that spread throughout me.

From small moments of physical beauty, I expanded my practice to small moments of experience. First, I decided that instead of preparing several Thanksgiving dishes in one evening, I would concentrate on the cranberry sauce, taking time to notice everything I could about the cranberries themselves and then about the cooking process. I wasn't disappointed. From all the shades of the berries-pink, red, mauve, apple, claret, scarlet-and the variations of round and oblong, to the way the berries morphed from hard, tight fruit, popping open from the heat, to a thick, deeply colored sauce that bubbled in the pot, by the time the sauce was prepared, I had experienced a high mass of sound, smell, color, texture, and taste.

I discovered one of my richest sources of joyful experience in moments of contact with other people. It wasn't long, intense conversations with close friends that filled me with happiness, though of course I enjoyed those. Instead, it was fleeting and unexpected

connections. One day, as I was headed down the block to the local greengrocer, a woman coming toward me on the sidewalk stopped and said, "I love the colors you're wearing today." Another day, a man invited me in line ahead of him in the supermarket. "You shouldn't have to wait for me. I have much more in my cart than you do."

By this time, I knew how to pay attention to the sense of well-being that burbled up within me, giving myself time to absorb these moments so they diffused their good vibrations throughout my mind, body, and spirit. I'd even realized that I could call up these experiences throughout the day to enhance my mood or help me over a rough spot. In fact, over the months, I began practicing small to keep myself from falling into the familiar pits of anger, loneliness, and depression. Now, if somebody hurt my feelings or did something that caused my anger to flare, I knew to conjure up a positive small moment from a day or two earlier to transmute those very negative feelings into something positive. If during a phone call, my mother criticized me unfairly, for example, instead of choosing to dive into



"It was the small moments of unexpected beauty that sent a rush of happiness through me."

JANE ANNE STAW

my usual quagmire of sadness and loneliness, I'd choose instead to think back to the past week, recall a moment of happiness or joy and sink into that. If I received a rejection from a magazine where I had submitted some writing, rather than choosing to begin my litany of self-criticism, I chose instead to conjure up my last success and hold onto that for several minutes, letting the positive feelings-not the darkness-take up my inner space.

At some point—I don't remember just when-I realized that practicing small had allowed me to become a much happier person. The technique I had discovered quite by chance was having a profound effect on my life. First, I had a strategy for avoiding the pull of my former negative feelings. And even more astonishing, those

negative feelings arose much less frequently. What had been a way of being for me trailed further and further behind in my past, while the present in which I lived was more and more filled with light.

About a year after my practice of small began, I spotted a book one day in my acupuncturist's waiting room: Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence. Hmmm, I thought, maybe that's what I've been doing. I picked the book up and began reading, excited that neuroscience revealed the mechanisms behind my discovery. The science to back up my discoveries did exist. The brain is plastic and we can rewire our neural pathways. By practicing small, I was generating the very positive moments the brain needs to rewire itself. Even

better, I thought, I was proactive in my own rewiring. I didn't have to wait for something good to happen, I could create the good on my own. Best of all, I felt more connected to people-those I knew and those I encountered fleetingly-than I had ever thought possible. And in those moments of beauty, connection, uplift, and pleasure, my relationship with the world was altered for the better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Anne Staw is a writer and life-long teacher. Small: The Little We Need for Happiness (Shanti Arts Publishers, 2017) is her most recent book. Practicing Small: A Thirty-Day Workbook is forthcoming from Shanti Arts Publishing. She is currently working on a new book: My Year of Loving Kindness: Reflections on Meditation.

Zero In On Gratitude

By cultivating the ability to notice what arises in our field of awareness pleasant or unpleasant—with sustained attention, we lay the foundation to experience genuine gratitude more easily and often.

by SCOTT ROGERS

It can be helpful to steady your mind and body, so that you're able to attend to and sustain your attention on whatever arises, which at times can be unpleasant and can pull you away from your engaged attentiveness to the moment as it is. In this body scan practice that incorporates breath awareness, we start by becoming attentive and relaxed in the present moment, and then we carry this stability and tranquility to an added step: cultivating gratitude. For example, when focusing our attention on an object like the breath and when noticing our mind wandering from that object, we can gently return or remember the breath, and we're able to do so with a little bit more engaged attentiveness and sustained capacity to stay with the object of our attention.

Assume a posture that is upright and stable. Become aware of your posture as you lower or close your eyes, whichever you prefer, and bring your attention to the body sitting, in this moment, as you breathe.

Be aware of the sensations of your body. Be aware of your body making contact with the chair, or the cushion beneath you, of the sensations of

where your feet may meet the ground, of your hands resting one in the other, or on your lap. Rest your attention on the sensations of your body, of your body breathing.

Engage in a series of slower, deeper breaths than you may normally take. Just a little slower, just a little deeper, as you breathe in, and out, in, and out, breathing in, and breathing out. Be aware of the breaths you're taking in this deliberate manner, for this too is a mindfulness practice. We are aware of the breath that flows in and out, as we feel and sense the movement of our breath.

Allow your breath to resume its natural rhythm, whatever that may be in this moment. Observe and notice your breath that naturally arises. As you follow your breath, allow this moment to be as it is. Rest your attention on the sensations of the breath, and when you notice from time to time that your mind has wandered in that moment of waking up out of forgetfulness, gently return your attention to your breath. Breathing in and breathing out, aware of breathing in and aware of breathing out. Remember your breath. The mind can move in

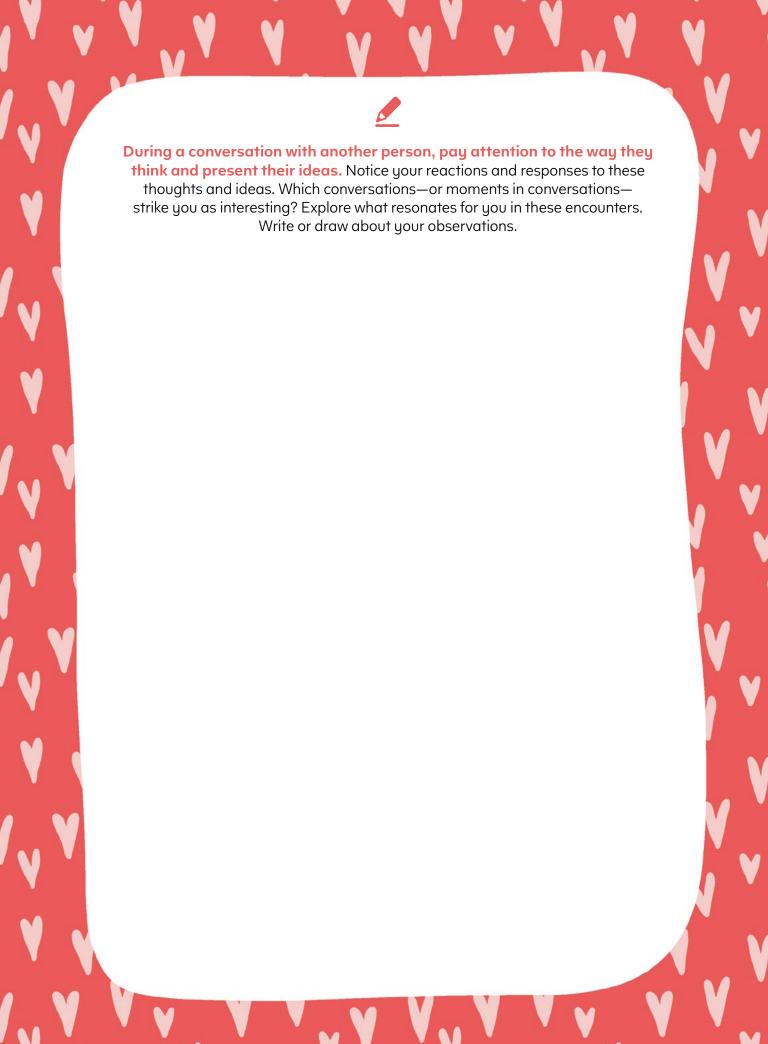
a thousand directions, but there is only this moment, this breath.

Expand your field of awareness around your breath and around your body. Bring to mind someone for whom you feel very grateful. Someone who has been good to you. Someone who has been thoughtful and kind, and there for you when you've needed them. As you bring to mind a sense of this person, as you hold them in your mind and in your heart in whatever way feels right, offer them an expression of your gratitude.

Bring your attention back to the breath. As you breathe, allow your sense of this person to recede into the background of awareness, as you draw your attention in to the body and to the breath. Be aware of the in-breath and aware of the out-breath. When you're ready in the next moment or two, with an awareness of doing so, lift your gaze and open your eyes.



Send gratitude to someone you love with this practice led by Scott Rogers: mindful.org/zero-in





PRACTICE

Tune In to the Nature of Your Mind

We can't stop thoughts from arising but we can stop getting lost in them. Here we can see our views, our thoughts, our worries, as only one part of a much larger story.

by VINNY FERRARO

We often live in a world completely defined by our thoughts. What is your relationship to your thoughts? Not only does the mind have a mind of its own, but, literally, we can have thoughts about not having thoughts. It's very easy to villainize thought as some kind of enemy. We get in our heads that if there were no thoughts we would be at peace, but even that's just another thought.

Here, we let go of that orientation. We still hear the internal talk, we still see the images in our minds, but we see their impermanence. When we practice seeing thoughts clearly as they arise, gently noting them, and returning to the breath and body, we experience a sense of spaciousness and clarity in which we can choose grateful thoughts and emotions more easily.



Uncover clarity around your thoughts with this practice by Vinny Ferraro: mindful.org/nature-mind

- As we begin, feel your body and allow yourself to arrive. This is the practice of kind awareness. Let your breathing be natural, easy. See if there's a sense of relief that you don't have to make anything happen or stop happening.
- Simply note when thoughts arise. When you notice thoughts arise, gently note: "planning, planning," or: "judging, judging." We're not noting things so that we can change them, we're just turning toward this phenomenon and noticing thoughts that usually fly under the radar. Most of the time, we're not even aware that they're there. So, we don't want to be lost in the dream of our own mental activity.
- Don't "quiet" your thoughts. You don't have to control thoughts or quiet them down; you just want to be aware of them as they arise, because any moment we're aware of them, we're not lost in them. You can think about it like we're sitting in a movie theater, and there are images and voices projected on the screen of the mind, but we're witnessing this phenomenon instead of being seduced by it. This frees up a lot of our awareness, when we don't have to chase every thought, so we can see the well-worn patterns of the mind and begin to recognize some of the themes that we're working with.
- Note thoughts without empowering them. Note thoughts without indulging or empowering or needing to suppress or avoid them. This way, whatever arises is known and allowed to simply pass through. Thought bubbles are touched lightly, their content completely irrelevant—they are just another object.
- Rest in your body. As things pass through the mind, be open and empty. This is a being, not a doing, so we don't have any need to search for something to note. But as thoughts are known, gently note them. Lightly touching thoughts, not lost in content, not trying to figure it out, but resting in the witnessing of what is naturally unfolding. The practice is to keep noticing, not by bearing down on thoughts or drilling into them, but by resting in your intuitive awareness and opening up your field of attention to include thoughts. Thoughts are so prevalent, they are a worthy anchor for meditation.





Notice the good ideas you have today, in any area of your life a new way of doing something, a response to a question somebody asks you, your perception of another person's behavior, your understanding of something you read, a new recipe you invent. How do those good ideas feel in your body when they arise? Write or draw about that.



Consider the ways in which your thought patterns and ideas are an important part of who you are. What do you observe about how and what you think? Write or draw what arises for you.

PRACTICE

Welcome Gratitude

Counteract your brain's negativity bias by using this practice to open a doorway in your heart for receiving gratitude and happiness.

by SHARON SALZBERG

Mindfulness does not depend on what is happening, but is about how we relate to what is happening. That's why we say that mindfulness and gratitude can go anywhere. In this practice, we focus our attention on the memory of a pleasant experience while allowing ourselves to be present with all the related thoughts and emotions that might bubble up, whether enjoyable or not. All of this complexity—this, too, is a jumping-off point for our gratitude practice.

Sit or lie down in a relaxed, comfortable posture. Your eyes can be open or closed. Now bring to mind a pleasurable experience you had recently, one that carries a positive emotion such as happiness, joy, comfort, contentment, or gratitude. If you can't think of a positive experience, be aware of giving yourself the gift of time to do this practice now.

Take a moment to cherish whatever image comes to mind with the recollection of the pleasurable experience. See what it feels like to sit with this recollection. Where in your body do you feel sensations arising? What are they? How do they change? Focus your attention on the part of your body where those sensations are the strongest. Stay with the awareness of your bodily sensations and your relationship to them, opening up to them and accepting them.

Now notice what emotions come up as you bring this experience to mind. You may feel moments of excitement, moments of hope, moments of fear, moments of wanting more. Just watch these emotions rise and pass away. All of these states are changing and shifting. Perhaps you feel some uneasiness about letting yourself feel too good, because you fear bad luck might follow. Perhaps you feel some guilt about not deserving to feel this happiness. In such moments, practice inviting in the feelings of joy or delight, and allowing yourself to make space for them. Acknowledge and fully experience such emotions.

Notice what thoughts may be present as you bring to mind the positive. Do you have a sense of being less confined or less stuck in habits? Or perhaps you find yourself falling back into thoughts about what went wrong in your day, what disappointed you-these thoughts can be more comfortable because they are so familiar. If so, take note of this. Do you tell yourself, I don't deserve this pleasure until I give up my bad habits, or I must find a way to make this last forever? Try to become aware of such add-on thoughts and see if you can let them go and simply be with the feeling of the moment.

End the meditation by simply sitting and being with the breath.

Be with the breath gently, as though you were cradling it. Then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.





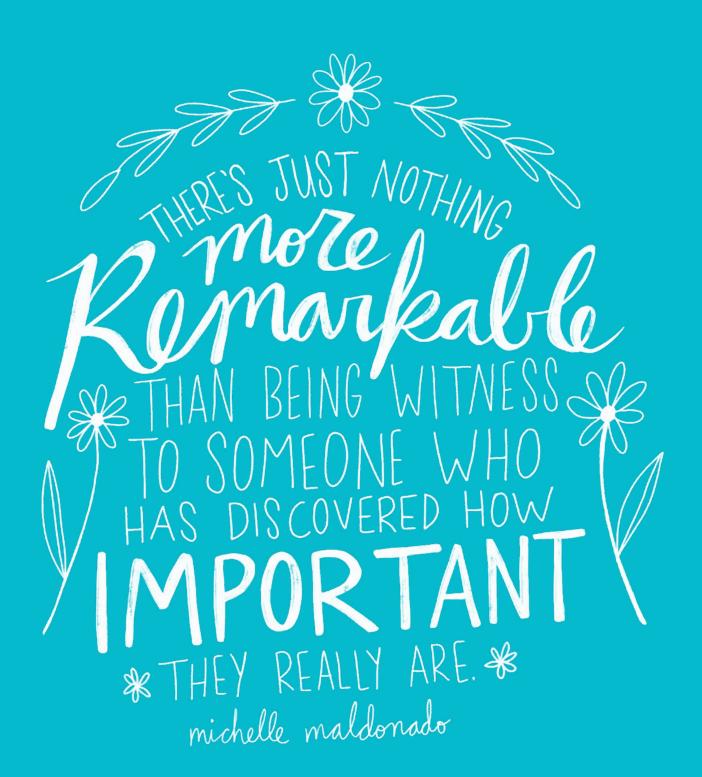


ILLUSTRATION BY PAIGE SAWLER

Cure What Ails You

The benefits of feeling thankful go well beyond improving your mood—research suggests gratitude can actually have a positive effect on your physical health.

bν MISTY PRATT

When digging into the science of gratitude, we begin to see it has more dimensions than meet the eve. In the scientific literature, gratitude is studied in several different ways. Trait gratitude refers to whether people have a naturally grateful personality. Gratitude as a mood tracks day-to-day fluctuations in gratitude, while gratitude as an emotion describes a passing feeling of gratitude (when receiving a thank you letter, for example). The gratitude interventions used in studies are designed to boost gratitude as a mood or emotion.

THE SCIENCE **Support Immunity** and Heart Health

Research shows that grateful people (those who have "trait gratitude") have fewer common health complaints, such as headaches, digestion issues, respiratory infections, runny noses, dizziness, and sleep problems. Practicing gratitude could also help to alleviate those pesky health problems. In one study, a group of college students who wrote gratitude lists weekly for ten weeks reported fewer physical symptoms (such as headaches, shortness of breath, sore muscles and nausea) compared to two control groups.

HOW IT WORKS Calm Your Nervous System

"Physiological changes associated with gratitude are typically a reduction in blood pressure and increase in vagal tone, which is taken as an index of increased parasympathetic influence on the peripheral nervous system," says Dr. Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Science Director at the Greater Good Science Center. The parasympathetic nervous system (the part of the nervous system that allows the body to "rest and digest") can conserve energy by slowing the heart rate, stimulating digestion, and contributing to an overall feeling of relaxation.

Soothing the nervous system may be one mechanism by which gratitude calms the body. A study of heart-failure patients assigned to either an eight-week gratitudejournaling group or a treatment-asusual group found that patients in the gratitude group showed more parasympathetic heart-rate variability, a sign of better heart health.

WHY PRACTICE? **Make Healthier** Choices

Strange as it may seem, gratitude can also encourage us to fuel our bodies with nourishing foods. Research shows grateful people report better physical health because they tend to engage in healthy activities. "We have found that getting people to express gratitude could help them work towards healthier eating behaviors, like more fruits and vegetables and less junk food," says Lisa Walsh, PhD, a postdoctoral research associate in social/personality psychology at University of California, Los Angeles. Lisa's graduate studies included research with Sonja Lyubomirsky's Positive Activities and Well-Being (PAW) Laboratory at the University of California, Riverside. In one of the PAW lab's studies, high school students pre-selected a healthy eating goal and were asked to either write weekly gratitude letters or list their daily activities. Teens who expressed gratitude reported healthier eating over time, compared to those who listed activities.

Other studies of physical health outcomes have found gratitude journaling can improve sleep quality and lower blood pressure.



Joy Is Not Trivial

A reflection on why joy matters, how it lifts us in good times and during challenges, and a practice to recognize what gets you through hardship.

by JENÉE JOHNSON

I love this quote from the book

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self while Caring for Others. It says, "Those who support trauma stewardship believe that both joy and pain are realities of life and that suffering can be transformed into meaningful growth and healing when a quality of presence is cultivated and maintained, even in the face of great suffering."

Joy is a spiritual mandate. It is the necessary nutrient that elevates us in good times and bad. People heal when they can access the upper registers of the emotional guidance scale, where joy, love, and gratitude reside. All human beings do better when we can find

joy in trying times. In the words of Frankie Beverly and Maze, "Joy and pain are like sunshine and rain." Do yourself a favor and look up that song—joy and pain are inseparable. They are a part of the natural cycle of life.

When it comes to healing and joy, I often refer to the six habits of happiness worth cultivating from the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley: kindness, movement, forgiveness, gratitude, social connection, and mindfulness.

The six habits of happiness allow us to nurture and maintain a quality of presence in the face of great suffering as well as in times of celebration. These habits improve our relationships, build internal resilience, and help us to see new possibilities. They help us to widen the perception of our own strength and increase our appreciation of life. These are the attributes of recovery and post-traumatic growth.

It is important to remember that recovery from trauma is possible. Sometimes we can look to our own families for inspiration. There are studies that not only document intergenerational transmission of trauma, but the intergenerational transmission of resilience. So, when we listen to the stories of our family members and ancestors who overcame challenges, that builds our connection to these overcomers and our own sense of self and self-esteem. →

FANDORINA LIZA / ADOBE STOCK

"The simple things in life, these are not trivial. These are the things that, practice-by-practice, build a perception and optimism of life and get us through the pain."

JENÉE JOHNSON

WHAT GETS YOU THROUGH TOUGH TIMES?

I like to ask people, "What is getting you through?" And when I ask this, people are responding: "my walk," "my dog," "swimming," "my grandchildren," "gardening," "drinking a cup of tea." The simple things in life, these are not trivial. These are the things that, practiceby-practice, build resilience and optimism in life and get us through the painful parts. It is here that we create and find joy in the pain. To move from pain to feeling a bit of joy: that's how we can counter the depleting emotions of stress and trauma, when we connect with our strength and our joy. That's how we create the space to be kind even when things are hard-and altruistic acts light up the same pleasure centers in the brain as food and sex. Who knew? That's powerful!

For me personally, I follow the Rwandan prescription for sadness or depression. After the Rwandan genocide, Western psychologists went to Rwanda to try to help, and they brought people into these little dingy rooms for talk therapy. People said, "We don't want to sit in these little gray rooms to just rehash all of the sadness and the trauma and the tragedy. That's not how we heal. We heal with sun, drum, dance, and community." I just adopted that prescription. I'm a former dancer and I am of Caribbean descent, so sunshine, dancing, and music are native to my culture and are uplifting to me. Remembering that movement is medicine and one of the six habits of happiness worth cultivating, movement is what helps me process intense emotions and heal.

I also rely on community. I turn to people who love me and can witness me. Connection is the healing balm of trauma. It is in connection that we experience the sweetness of being met with compassion.

During the first part of the pandemic, I met with a friend weekly on FaceTime with our tea or wine or water. We talked, shared our deep sadness, cried, laughed, and celebrated our accomplishments. Just one person who brings me joy.

Community doesn't require 50 people. Just connect with one person consistently. Make it easy, have fun, enjoy being together. That's my prescription.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenée Johnson is is the Program Innovation Leader: Mindfulness, Trauma, and Racial Equity at the San Francisco Department of Public Health and founder of the Right Within Experience.



Listen to Your Heart

Take your energy back from painful emotions by sending your own heart a message of deep love.

by JENÉE JOHNSON

This practice is designed to help turn down the volume on emotions that can deplete you. It can help you establish a calm but alert state, maintain composure, and shift to encourage balance: heart, mind, and emotions.

Find yourself sitting in an upright but relaxed position. Drop your gaze or close your eyes and connect to your breath.

Bring your attention to the area of your heart. Imagine your breath is flowing in and out of your heart or chest area. Breathe a little slower and deeper than usual. If you feel comfortable, just place your hand on your chest. Give yourself this moment to turn your attention to yourself, to your own well-being, to the beauty of your own life. Breathe deeply and slowly.

Notice where your mind goes. If your mind wanders, it's OK. Lovingly and gently bring your attention back to your breath. The mind is busy, but no need to avert, no need to grasp. Just come back, focusing the breath, breathing through the heart. Gently, easily.

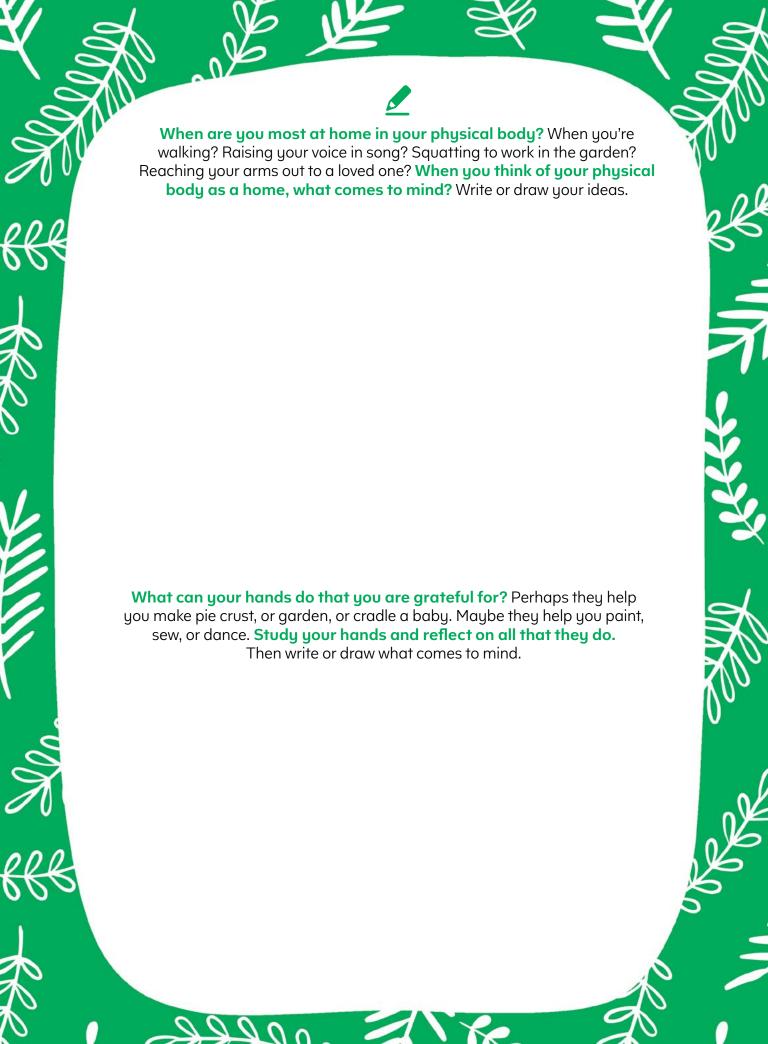
Inquire. I'd like you to ask yourself: What has gotten me through? What has gotten me through challenges, disappointments, complexity, uncertainty? Gently, quietly, let your heart speak to you. And listen.

Take a moment to recognize that you have strengths. You have resources. You have people. Take this moment now to see a new possibility.

Set an intention. On the next breath, I'd like you to set an intention for how you would like to move through the rest of this day, or tomorrow, or this week.

Offer yourself some love. Know that you're here because you made it through painful moments. Activate a sense of feeling renewed. Listen for your essential truths. Confirm your own strength. Acknowledge new possibilities. You are worthy of this moment of loving attention. Deep breath in, audible exhale out.

Open your eyes gently. May you move forward with a bit more ease.



Savor Your Senses

This five-minute mindfulness practice cultivates gratitude for life's small delights as you move through your senses.

by Elaine smookler

When I wake up some wintry mornings, glancing at my weather app (ominously predicting many days of snow and icy temperatures ahead), I can feel the chill of dark thoughts starting to gather. Life's challenges are seemingly everywhere. Yet, if we want to cultivate resilience, we can tune our awareness to appreciating life's small delights.

My experience shifted when I became curious and focused intentionally on the things that I appreciated. Now, on those chilly mornings, I can also smell my neighbor's coffee brewing, hear the snow outside, and sense my husband's warm weight in the bed. Difficulties are still present, but I can recognize that many things are quite lovely.

The next time you wish to broaden your gratitude horizons, tune in to each of your senses, and see what you discover!

Let your senses guide
you with this audio practice

you with this audio prac from Elaine Smookler: mindful.org/senses

- To begin, use the breath to anchor yourself in the present moment.

 Our minds are always so easily pulled to busyness. Bring particular attention to feeling the breath, or something in the body, as you bring your shoulders down and orient your attention toward gratitude.
- **Bring to mind a sight you are grateful for.** Find one thing you appreciate from the world of sight, if it's available to you. It could be a color...a shadow... a shape...a movement. Remember, it will never be like this again. What do you see right now, and can you feel grateful that you get to see this, whatever it is?
- Now, shift to a scent you appreciate. What do you notice? What about that glorious or interesting or subtle smell is making you smile? It could be gratitude: a scent that brings comfort, upliftment; or maybe it's something you've never smelled before, and it piques your curiosity, ignites you, enlivens you.
- Moving on, tune in to any sounds around you. On an in-breath, shift your attention to your ears. Notice what it feels like to really listen. How many sounds can you notice, and can you feel grateful that you're able to experience sound, if you are? What can you notice about these sounds—are they far away? close? Perhaps you could play a piece of music that brings you joy, and have gratitude that it's so available? Or maybe it's the sound of children laughing, the sound of loved ones breathing, the sound of the beating of your own heart.
- The world of touch and texture beckons us next. If there's someone near who you can hug, notice how this fills you with gratitude for the joy of human contact. Perhaps you have a beautiful pet you can stroke and cuddle, or some lovely material with a texture that feels warm to the touch, soft, evocative.
- Shift to noticing and appreciating objects around you. Now take a moment to look around: up, down, and side to side. Appreciate how much effort must have gone into anything at all you own or use. Someone conceived of the need and many people worked on the details of the design. Much care even went into the packaging to deliver your item to you safely. What do you feel when you let yourself be grateful that all that talent went into making your life a little easier? And as you end this practice, carry this attitude of gratitude with you. Why not offer your thanks to each person who does anything at all for you today? Notice how this open-hearted gratitude makes you feel.

Reconnect to Your Body

Embodied awareness is a way for us to connect to the present moment by using the body, the breath, or any other sensory experience to ground ourselves.

by sebene selassie

The word mindfulness can lead us to think that meditation is all about the mind. In fact, we bring an embodied awareness to our practice when we can bring a full awareness of our mind, our heart, and our body-that's our thoughts, our emotions, and our sensations. And with that, we actually have much more capacity to be present, to be clear, to be kind.

Find a comfortable position. You may be standing, sitting, or even lying down-the most important thing is that you feel relaxed and alert. Make sure that you have some openness in the front of your body. You can roll your shoulders up and back. Or, if you're lying down, just allow your shoulders to really relax into the floor. You want to have some uprightness or length in your spine without being rigid or stiff. And you want to invite a softness into the face, the jaw, the shoulders, and the belly. This balanced posture of being both relaxed and alert, being both soft and open, is the beginning of our embodied awareness.

Notice how the body is feeling in this moment. You don't need to change anything about the mind, your thoughts, the heart, your emotions, the body, or any sensations. Simply allow what's happening to be in your awareness. How does your body feel right now?

Feel what's going on physically or mentally. What sensations are you experiencing? Where may there be tightness or tension in the body? And where is there ease or relaxation? You can close your eyes if you'd like, or keep them open as you continue to rest your awareness on the body.

Just notice what's present, and allow any thoughts or emotions to be there. Take a deep breath in through the nose, and as you exhale, you can even make a sighing sound. Release any tension in the body as you breathe in and out. Do this a few times on your own as you breathe in, opening the front of the body, and as you breathe out, really softening and relaxing. Allow the breath to come to its natural rhythm, and just take a moment in silence to notice your bodily sensations. You don't have to think about the body, but feel any sensations or vibrations.

Now, see if you can feel what's supporting your body right now. It could be a chair, a cushion, a bed, or the floor or ground beneath you. Just really sense into your feet or seat, allowing yourself to feel grounded. Bring awareness to the pressure or the weight of the body. What is that sensation like?

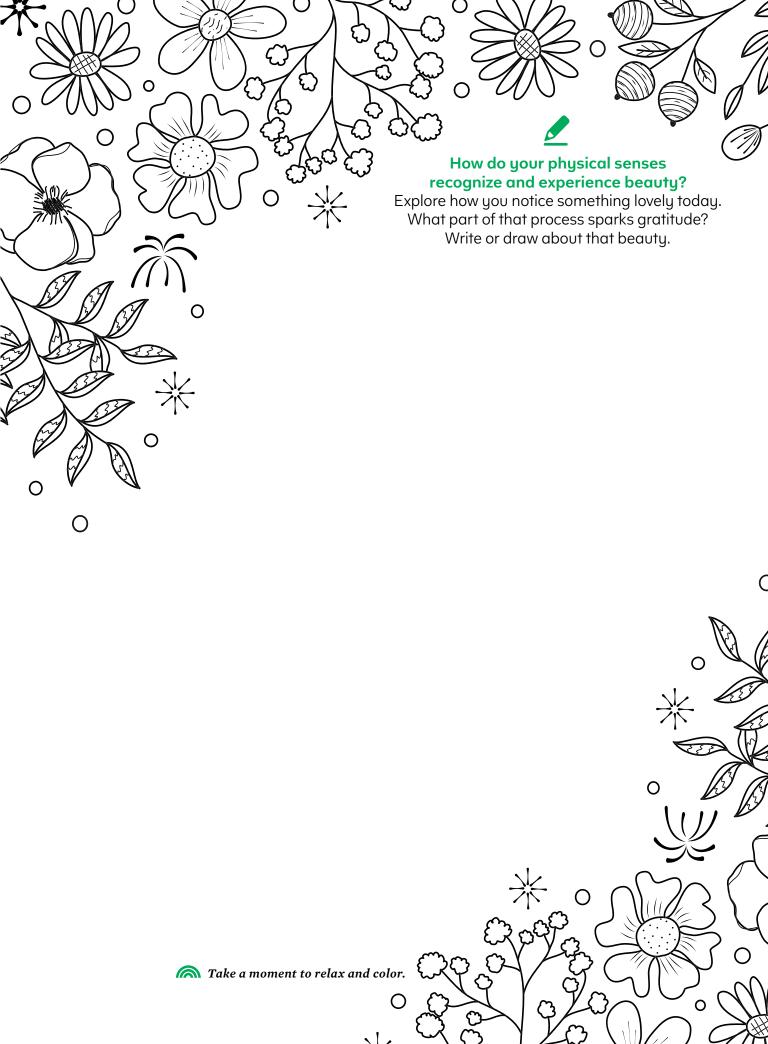
Bring your awareness to the flow of your breath. You might want to take one or two deep breaths in and

out through the nose to connect you to this process that's always happening (whether we pay attention or not). You can notice the belly rising and falling as you breathe in and out. If you're having trouble connecting to the sensation, you can place one or both hands over your belly button to feel the belly rising on the inhale and falling on the exhale. If the breath is hard for you to follow, you can rest your awareness on any part of the body that brings you a sense of ease of connection.

As we end this meditation, take a moment to express gratitude toward yourself for taking time to cultivate this practice. Embodied awareness is a way for us to stay with our experience by using the body, the breath, or any sensory experience as a way to connect to the present moment. Not by pushing away thoughts or emotions, but by allowing the body to be the ground for our awareness. Just take a moment in silence to rest in this embodied awareness. Know that in any moment, you can reconnect to the body, the breath, the sense of groundedness as a way to create spaciousness, ease, and rootedness.



Feel into your body with this audio practice from Sebene Selassie: mindful.org/reconnect





Let Your Body Rest

Take a restorative moment to release tension and feel deeply into gratitude for your hard-working body.

by RASHID HUGHES

Taking a moment to pause with the intention to simply allow our bodies to rest in awareness can bring about a great sense of restoration and renewal to the heart. Our bodies are so overworked and often ignored. This guided awareness practice will allow us to feel a sense of gratitude for our body, in all of its beauty and mystery.

Starting off, find the posture that feels comfortable for you in this moment. Check in with your body to sense into what posture is best for me right now?

Begin to notice and feel your body here and present, not trying to fix or change anything about the body. In this moment, we're inviting our bodies to just rest naturally.

Take a few moments to feel what it means to be alive in your body right now. Just notice: How is my body expressing its aliveness in this moment? Maybe that's with lots of sensation, maybe the body just feels relaxed and at ease, or maybe there's energy moving through. Whatever is true for your body right now, allow this aliveness to be what you sense into in this moment. This is my body and I'm grateful for my body.

Now, allow your attention to lightly rest on the sensations associated with the body touching whatever is supporting it. This is my body resting, supported by what's under me at this moment and I'm grateful for this body and for this support and this moment to rest. Let the support, the stability, and the comfort of having something holding you really infuse your body and your awareness. In this moment, I'm being held and supported and this support is stable, and unconditional, and I am grateful.

Invite your body to rest in the feeling of the space around the body. We're allowing our attention to rest on the skin of the body. And with each exhale, let your attention begin to relax and expand out beyond the skin, just a few inches, resting in this space. Now we're inviting the energy in the body—the tingling, the sensations—to actually rest in the space around us. Imagine that, with every exhalation, you begin to sense your body being held by the vastness of the space surrounding the body.

Start with your back, inviting the back to rest. Just let go into the space behind you. And shifting to one side of the body, feeling that side, feeling the skin, and then inviting that side of the body to just let go. To relax

into the space around that side of the body. And then going to the front of the body: feeling the skin, the body sensations, and the aliveness, and just allowing the front of the body to be held and to rest into the space in front. And lastly, arriving at the other side of the body, sensing the skin of the body, then letting your attention relax into the space around that side of the body.

For a few moments, breathing in and out naturally, allow your attention to rest as the body is resting, in the space around the body. The body can let go now. Breathing in, we feel the body held in our awareness. Breathing out, we're grateful for the space around the body. It allows the body to relax.

As we close this practice, place a hand on your heart, feeling a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the body, the space around the body, and this moment of resting. Gratitude for the body is a way that we can always reconnect with this sense of rest, presence, and ease.



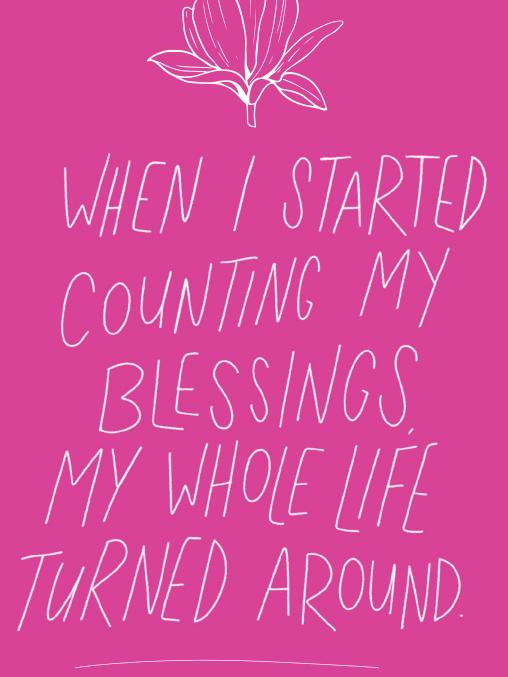
Explore deep rest with this audio practice from Rashid Hughes: mindful.org/rest-practice



SECTION THREE

CONNECTION

When we bring gratitude into our relationships, we create close, supportive, and resilient bonds with those we love.



WILLIE NELSON

ILLUSTRATION BY PAIGE SAWLER

Nurtured By Love

Most of us realize that a lack of appreciation for your friends, family, or romantic partner is a surefire way to weaken those relationships. Read on to find out what gratitude can do to fortify these close connections.

by MISTY PRATT

The find-remind-bind theory,

first proposed by psychologist Sara Algoe-an associate professor at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill-suggests that gratitude can help people identify good candidates for a new relationship (find), appreciate existing relationships (remind), and motivate people to maintain or invest in these relationships (bind). As Sara writes in a 2012 paper on her theory: "Gratitude starts inside one individual and its effects spread to a dvadic relationship and perhaps throughout a social network."

THE SCIENCE **Stronger Bonds**

"Social connection is likely key to well-being," says postdoc research associate Lisa Walsh. She explains that gratitude appears to have social implications by motivating individuals to improve themselves. In a new study from the PAW Laboratory at UC-Riverside, high school students who expressed gratitude had a mixed experience—they felt "elevated" (a positive emotion) and indebted. Immediately after writing their gratitude letters, the students

also felt motivated to improve themselves. Find-remind-bind theory suggests expressing gratitude may prompt individuals to pay back the kindness they have received, and can also motivate a person to make decisions that will strengthen their relationships. Gratitude may increase a person's desire to spend more time with someone, and it encourages prosocial behaviours.

HOW IT WORKS Caring Communication

Gratitude also plays an important role in maintaining romantic relationships, acting as a "booster shot" to remind individuals why their partners are valuable and worth holding onto. By practicing gratitude couples can initiate a cycle of generosity—one partner's gratitude inspires the other partner to act in a way that reaffirms their commitment to each other. One study found that receiving a thoughtful gesture from a partner was followed by increased feelings of gratitude and indebtedness. Experiencing gratitude from these acts of kindness led both partners to feel more connected and satisfied with their relationship the next day. All the ways we communicate—letters, conversation, and social media—are avenues for the expression of gratitude.

Gratitude may also open the door to healthier communication styles within a relationship. Since the practice leads to more positive perceptions of our partners, friends, or family (and likely, greater trust), we may feel more comfortable talking through disagreements. In one study, participants who expressed gratitude toward a romantic partner or close friend reported greater ease when voicing relationship concerns in the future.

WHY PRACTICE It's Better Together

"Gratitude has made our family closer," says Randi Joy, a chiropractor and life coach living in Ottawa. Her family's been practicing gratitude together for about five years. "When we talk about our gratefulness and what we're grateful for...we have a better connection," she says. Whether it's a gratitude walk, or a list of their "gratefuls" at dinner, Randi's family takes every opportunity to practice together.



No, Your Soulmate Isn't Perfect

Contentment in a relationship comes from looking for what you're grateful for in your mate, not the ways you think they fall short.

by CHERYL FRASER

Once upon a time, I believed

Shaun Cassidy, teen singing idol and one of TV's sexy Hardy Boys, was my soulmate. There I was clad in the kilt and knee socks of a private school girl, lusting over this blueeyed heartthrob and completely convinced we would fall in love. He would meet my deepest desires (and based on the surprisingly explicit fantasies I penned starring him and me, those desires needed meeting). When he whisked me away to his Beverly Hills mansion I would know and be known. Mated at the

soul level, I would never feel alone again.

Turns out Shaun was not my soulmate. I look back at the confused girl I was with a mixture of amusement and compassion. I was suffering. I thought my perfect mate existed. You did, too. Back then we all believed if we could only find that one special person he or she would make us happy, ever after.

The problem is that now I'm 51, not 13, and yet traces of that longing still invade my mind and bedevil

my relationship. 'Cause I love my sweetheart but he is definitely not my soulmate, either. He hasn't vet swept me off to live in a Beverly Hills mansion, and he can't sing "Da Doo Ron Ron" worth a darn. And I am willing to admit that I freak out and become convinced that I have committed to the wrong person—that my "real" partner is still out there. That guy writes books on neurocognition, creates nonprofits to save every street dog, and plays polo in between Kama Sutra training sessions. →

"With mindfulness, we learn we have a choice to either indulge an illusion, or dismiss it and embrace reality. Now apply this to love. "

CHERYL FRASER

Oh, sorry, I'm back. I got lost in a juicy fantasy there for a minute. Because deep down I still carry a subconscious soulmate templateupdated frequently as my own interests and values evolve-and when I am not paying attention, my mind compares the imperfect human, who is currently snoring in the bedroom, to the ideal hunk in my head. I mean, c'mon-here I sit, working on a weekend, drinking the tea I had to brew all by myself, and he isn't even massaging my tootsies or spoon-feeding me kale smoothies. Sheesh. Clearly I can do better.

Funny? Perhaps. Our minds are fairly ridiculous. But it's a lot less funny if I indulge these thoughts, inviting them to hijack the present moment and sweep me into the emotionally booby-trapped land of What If.

What if I leave my partner and seek the man who is really meant for me? Well, here is what I would find if I looked: not someone better,

but someone different. A person with strengths in areas my partner lacks. And-an unexamined, ludicrous, and dangerous assumption-someone who would make me happier than I currently am.

This soulmate trap is subconscious and powerful. Like a shark, it lurks until a moment of disgruntlement invites it to take a chomp out of your contentment. So what to do? We must kill the soulmate.

Mindfulness can help us embrace others, flaws and all. In meditation, a thought arises. Examine it. Is it true? Is it real? Blast it with the lightsaber of awareness and it disappears. Then we are left with the bare experience of what is actually occurring, not our concept or storvline.

We learn we have a choice to either indulge an illusion, or dismiss it and embrace reality. Now apply this to love. We can clearly look at our sweetheart and focus on the many joys they bring to our life.

And each time our mind zips off to soulmate land, we can practice letting go of the fantasy person and, instead, bring to mind the qualities we love about the one we are with. After all, no human can live up to the "perfect" paramour we create in our head. As we intentionally deepen our appreciation of the partner who exists here and now, we learn we don't need the intellectual polo sex dude to make things better. Happiness is available right here and now. In fact, reality is pretty great. Even when reality is snoring.

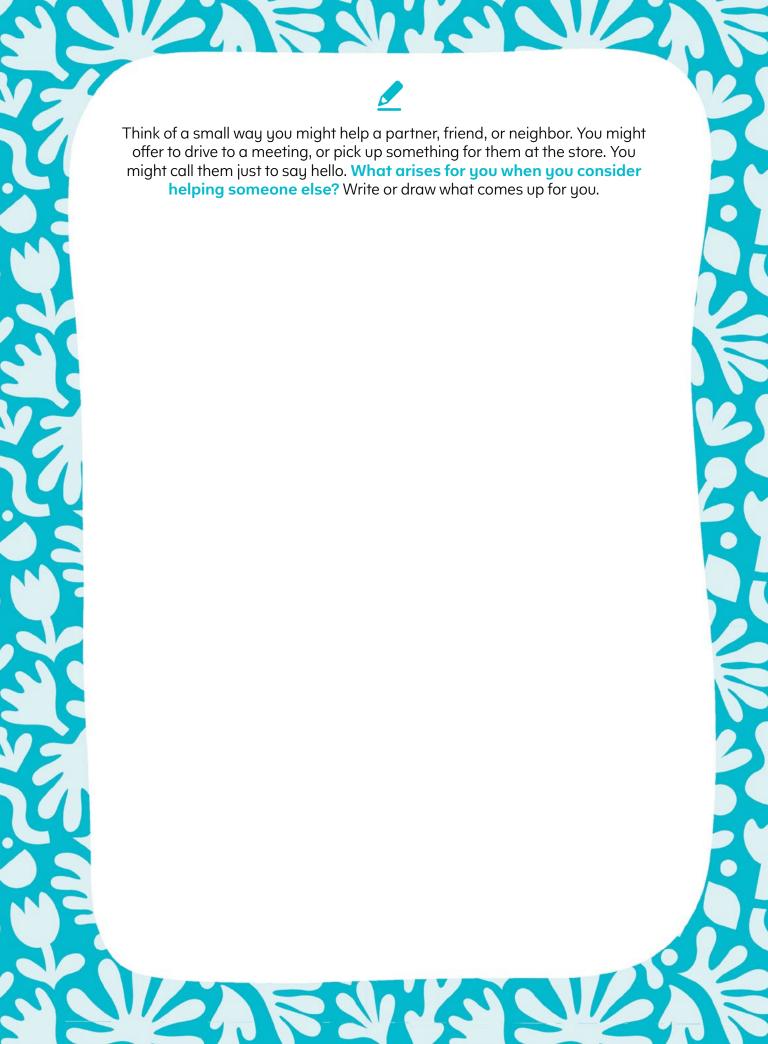
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Cheryl Fraser is a psychologist, sex therapist, meditation teacher and author who has helped thousands of couples jumpstart their love life and create passion that lasts a lifetime. Her most recent book is Buddha's Bedroom: The Mindful Loving Path to Sexual Passion and Lifelona Intimacy.



Bring to mind a close friend, roommate, or partner. **What do you appreciate about this person?** Notice how it feels to spend time appreciating something particular about someone else. Write or draw your appreciation.





TAKE ACTION

Grateful On the Job

Six go-to tips to help inspire an ethos of gratitude in your workplace.

by JEN FISHER

A regular practice of gratitude may be one of the most overlooked tools we have access to in the workplace. Research shows that an attitude of gratitude can improve our physical and emotional health, help us sleep better (avoiding the kind of exhaustion that leads to burnout), and nurture relationships at work.

What's even more exciting is that gratitude can bring out the full potential of those around us. In one study, employees who were thanked more often had better sleep, fewer headaches, and healthier eating habits—all because their work satisfaction spiked. And the nature of gratitude is that it leads to a pay-it-forward mentality: When team members feel appreciated, they're more invested in helping others feel the same. No wonder gratitude is linked with being a better "organizational citizen" meaning workers go above and beyond to do things like mentor junior staffers or deliver exceptional customer service.

Be spontaneous. In this busy world, we often forget the power of a simple yet heartfelt "thank you." But it takes as little as 30 seconds to tell someone how they impacted you in some way-big or small. I keep note cards in my desk drawer, so when a colleague does something I appreciate, I can take a couple of minutes to write a note letting them know what they did and how it made me feel.

Make it personal. Often, communicating via our devices doesn't lend itself to a heartfelt expression of gratitude. Case in point: Hitting "reply all" on a 16-message email thread to say "thanks for that" just doesn't come across as sincere or warm. Instead, take a moment—offline, if possible—to say, "Hey, that thing you did really impacted me, and I want you to know how much I appreciate you."

Keep a journal. Whether you use a notebook or your phone, one of the best ways to flex your gratitude muscles is to create a writing ritual. Toward the end of each day, I jot down five things or people I'm grateful for that day. Some days, the list is a quick, breezy exercise; other days, it's longer and more detailed. Try not to judge what you write; the important thing is to do it.

Go inward. Thanks doesn't always have to be aimed at someone else. One study found that when people appreciated their own contributions and even their little victories at work, both their mood and motivation improved. So in addition to your to-do list, try keeping a self-gratitude list. In those moments when you feel discouraged, skimming it may give you just the boost you need.

Find gratitude in challenging times. It's easy to be thankful when things are going well. But it's important to also cultivate appreciation for the experiences that teach us something. For instance, if a boss delivered a difficult piece of feedback, perhaps you can be grateful for the opportunity to grow from it. Or if a work event didn't go as planned, maybe you can thank yourself for handling the situation with grace.

Keep looking for different moments of appreciation. In my own gratitude journal, I try not to repeat the things I write down for at least a two-week period. This forces me to see the good that may otherwise go unnoticed. And when it comes to the workplace, it allows me to appreciate the many different actions, attributes, and behaviors that my team members bring to the table, each and every day.

Cultivate **Embodied Gratitude**

This practice infuses the body with a sense of gratitude, which can then overflow as appreciation for the people in our lives.

by SHELLY TYGIELSKI

Let your body relax and soften.

You can either close your eyes or soften your gaze. Taking a long, slow, deep inhale, remind yourself of your body's inherent awareness, ease, and vitality.

Begin by directing your attention to the top of your head, and as thoughts arise, just let them be.

Be aware of any tension in your scalp, and on your next inhalation, pause and breathe out gratitude. Place the palms of your hands over your eyes gently. As you breathe in, see if you can soften your eyes. As you breathe out, let go of all the tightness around your eyes.

On your next inhalation, bring your awareness to the place in your nostrils where you can feel the air entering and going out. Let your concentration deepen.

Take your time as you continue moving down through the body,

inhaling, accepting any tension, and exhaling as you soften and relax. Soften your mouth, your throat, neck, and shoulders. Continue on to relaxing your arms, your fingers, your spine and chest. Move your awareness all the way down your legs, into your feet.

Then, reverse it: Slowly bring your awareness from your feet to your legs to your pelvic area and stomach... your chest, your heart... your shoulders, your neck, your face, breathing in and out smoothly as your awareness travels up and through your body. Reaching the top of your head, return your awareness to your breath.

From this place of physical gratitude, bring to your mind's eye somebody who you feel a great amount of love for. Notice how this feels in your heart. Notice the sensations around your heart: warmth, openness, tenderness.

Let this individual know how grateful you are for what they mean to you, completing the sentence: I am grateful for your presence in my life, and this is why... And just take a moment to list the reasons. Allow this person to embrace you, and feel the joy in your own heart as they accept your gratitude.

Next, bring your attention to a person you barely know at all.

Maybe it was the woman who checked out your groceries at the supermarket yesterday, or the server at the restaurant you frequent.

Let this individual know why you are grateful for them: I am grateful for your presence in my life, and this is why... And take a moment to list the

reasons, embracing them, feeling the joy in your heart as if they've accepted your gratitude.

Now, envision yourself standing in front of yourself, and say to yourself: I offer my gratitude for the safety and well-being I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the blessing of this earth that I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the measure of health I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the family and friends I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the teachings and lessons I have been given. I offer my gratitude for this life that I have been given. And let yourself know: I am grateful for who I am and for this life, and this is why...

Wish yourself safety and joy and happiness, feeling that your heart is filled with compassion and gratitude and that you're looking forward to what's to come, because no matter what you have to face in your life, you can do so with gratitude in your heart for every day that you wake up and are given another day here on Earth.



Share your gratitude with this audio practice by Shelly Tygielski: mindful.org/embody-gratitude

Who has done something sweet for you lately? Perhaps a friend invited you to lunch or phoned to see how you're doing. Or maybe your roommate scrubbed down the kitchen. Or someone sent you a link to an article they thought you might appreciate. How do small kindnesses feel? Write or draw those warm feelings.



Notice acts of tenderness between others—a couple, a parent and a child, a guardian and a pet—or bring to mind a favorite scene of tenderness from a movie, television show, or book.

How do these moments resonate for you?

PHOTO-NUKE / ADOBE STOCK

Strengthen Your Love

Explore this mindfulness practice for keeping the lines of communication open and maintaining a deep, loving connection.

by TARA BRACH

With my husband, Jonathan, I've developed a practice for keeping our lines of communication open and maintaining a deep, loving connection. We do this practice together two mornings a week.

It may be surprising that this practice includes sharing what may be coming between you and your partner. Yet, naming difficult truths brings more love and understanding into a relationship. There are times when I get busy and Jonathan takes on a larger portion of the household responsibilities and ends up feeling unappreciated, and I need to be reminded to express my appreciation. When we acknowledge what could cause resentment if left unsaid, it brings us closer together. For this step to be productive, it's essential for both partners to practice speaking and listening from a place of vulnerability, without blaming the other person.

- **Begin by sitting silently together** for 10–20 minutes, as time allows.
- Next, take turns telling each other what you're grateful for, what's enlivening your heart at present. This is called "gladdening the heart," and it serves as a good way to open the channel of communication.
- Next, take turns naming any particular challenges you're dealing with that are currently causing you stress. These are difficulties you're facing apart from your relationship.
- Then, deepen your inquiry by taking turns noting anything that might be restricting the sense of love and openness you feel toward your partner. First, you might ask yourself: "What is between me and feeling openhearted and intimate with my partner?" This is potentially the stickiest part of the practice, as well as the most rewarding.
- Next, expand your inquiry to see whether there's anyone in your wider circle who also calls out for your attention—in your family, friend circle, or society at large who's important to you as an individual or as a couple. Take turns identifying them, and sense what might serve well-being in this larger domain of relationship.
- **6** Lastly, enjoy some moments of silent appreciation together, ideally in a long, tender hug.







LORRAINE HANSBERRY

ILLUSTRATION BY PAIGE SAWLER

Thriving in Communit

If you're looking for a way you can help your community work together for the common good, the science is clear: Show up with gratitude.

by MISTY PRATT

A common finding from the research on gratitude is how the practice influences prosocial behaviour, which is when people act in a way that is helpful to others. Think about the last time you faced a significant challenge; hopefully, people in your life rallied around you, providing warm meals, emotional support, or even an encouraging word on social media. This support may have comforted and energized you, and this makes it more likely that you would do the same for others in the future.

THE SCIENCE **A Satisfied Life**

Although a person can feel grateful for the things in their life, most gratitude is directed toward other people and their actions. We can also feel grateful for the natural world, noticing and appreciating fresh air, sunshine and water. Studies have found that dispositional (or "trait") gratitude is associated with less materialistic values. Less materialistic people tend to have greater life satisfaction.

Gratitude has also been linked to higher GPAs, more motivation to join extracurricular activities, and a stronger desire to contribute to social issues. One study looked at

whether 10 minutes of gratitude letter writing each week compared to a control group protected students against declines in self-improvement motivation over the course of the semester.

"We actually see with interventions with high school and college students that people tend to get less happy as the semester wears on, probably because of stress," says postdoc research associate Lisa Walsh. "In our study, we saw that the gratitude students were able to maintain their life satisfaction and motivation, while the controls were decreasing in satisfaction throughout the semester."

HOW IT WORKS Feedback Reward

How gratitude practice strengthens our motivation for self-improvement has a lot to do with something called elevation. "Elevation comes out in gratitude literature across the board," says Lisa. People feel elevated after witnessing moral acts of virtue, which Lisa describes as a warmth in the chest-feeling moved by what other people have done and inspired to be a better person.

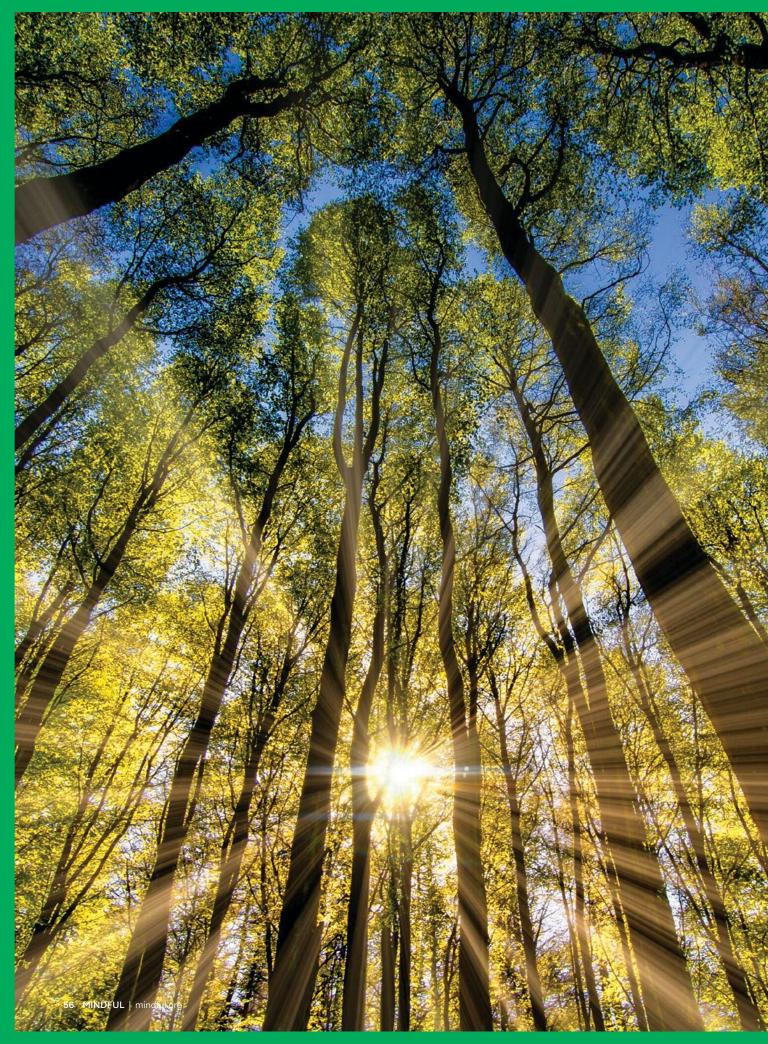
Research into the neural link between gratitude and giving shows that gratitude activates the part of

the brain associated with socializing and experiencing pleasure. "Gratitude upregulates our reward pathways," says Greater Good Science Center Science Director Dr. Emiliana Simon-Thomas. "The brain is basically a sponge for repetition, and whatever gets repeated gets easier to bring to mind."

WHY PRACTICE? **Kindness Matters**

Much of the gratitude literature is focused on the actors, meaning the people who are expressing their gratitude. However, receivers or witnesses of gratitude may also experience benefits. Random-actsof-kindness videos on social media may inspire you to emulate that behaviour. Alternatively, people who receive an expression of gratitude (like a thank-you card) may feel motivated to increase behaviours such as volunteering or donating to help others after a disaster.

Researchers believe that gratitude and kindness overlap. Randi Joy, in Ottawa, says that this has been true for her own gratitude practice, and that her family now gives more back to their community. "I feel like sometimes gratitude goes hand in hand with random acts of kindness."



The Heart of Gratitude

Whether you think of it as the "greatest virtue," as Cicero did, or "social glue," as researchers do, gratitude has the power to change your life, if you let it.

by KELLY BARRON

I haven't always been grateful.

Sure, I gave gratitude lip service on Thanksgiving. Surrounded by family, friends, and bountiful food I shared, I was grateful for...family, friends, and bountiful food. But I didn't feel it in my bones.

Over the years, I made gratitude lists, but they didn't make me feel more thankful. As a result, I've come to view gratitude like a greeting card—nice, but paper-made and a little clichéd.

My ambivalence toward gratitude unsettles me. There's much in my life to feel thankful for. What's more, as a longtime meditator and mindfulness teacher, I'm aware of the lofty place gratitude holds in the pantheon of positive emotions. Contentment is pleasant. Joy is delightful. But gratitude

is the mother lode.

Cicero called gratitude "the greatest virtue" for fostering patience, generosity, wisdom, and humility. Researchers also call gratitude a social glue that bonds us in friendship and appreciation.

Who wouldn't want to feel more grateful?

If I wanted a closer relationship with gratitude, I'd need to deepen my understanding, become more attentive, and practice.

WHEN CHALLENGES **ARE BLESSINGS**

I began with journalistic curiosity. I read scientific papers. I interviewed friends and my friends' friends. I asked my hairdresser, neighbors,

and strangers in grocery stores about gratitude. I spoke with neuroscientists, mindfulness teachers, and a minister.

I spoke with people such as Kaneshia Williamson, who never thought she'd become so accomplished. She grew up in the roughand-tumble neighborhood of Watts, Los Angeles, raised an autistic son, and at age 44, works two jobs—one as a dental assistant and another as a caregiver. She's also going to school to become a dental hygienist.

Kaneshia oozes gratitude, crediting her mother and her faith in God with giving her strength to rise above her circumstances and gifting her with the perspective that challenges can be blessings.

When talking with me on the



phone about her son, her voice brightened, and I imagined a smile spreading across her face. → She told me she's befriended the most incredible people through her son's participation in the Special Olympics. She's become a better person because of him.

"He's brought out qualities in me I didn't even know I had," she said, adding that she's stronger, more patient, and more selfless. She also knows how to love unconditionally because of her son.

Gratitude flourished in others who had dealt with hardships such as a health crisis or addiction. My friend Nikki Young Lebow, who's been sober for more than 30 years, said the seed of gratitude was planted within her the moment she realized she wasn't going to die because of drugs and alcohol.

She was a couple of months sober and hanging out with friends in a house overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It was, she told me, the golden hour—that time of day when sunlight becomes magical and illuminates everything, including the goodness surrounding you. Looking

at her friends and the shimmering water below, she thought: "Oh my God, my life is going to be okay."

FIND FLEETING CONNECTIONS

Like a Joshua tree in the desert, gratitude often grows in harsh environments. Pain, loss, and grief can give us a greater appreciation of life's blessings and their transience.

"The way I affirm gratitude is to recognize its fragility—the fragility of goodness," said meditation teacher Matthew Brensilver.

Acknowledging the impermanence of all that is good in our lives affirms their value and allows us to experience them more deeply, he said.

Matthew's comments rang within me like a singing bowl. When I've felt grateful, it's been through the fleeting but satisfying connection to bright spots in daily life—the sun warming my back or a pleasant conversation with a grocery store cashier.

Others I spoke to also tune in

to gratitude when immersed in the small, good moments of their lives—swimming with their kids at a Holiday Inn pool or walking their dog in the early morning quiet.

Listening to the varied ways people felt grateful, I wondered: What is gratitude?

Like Baskin-Robbins ice cream, it comes in lots of flavors. Researchers variously refer to it as an emotion, an attitude, a virtue, a moral sentiment, and a coping response.

While gratitude is complex, it's commonly defined as the recognition of receiving something positive through your own efforts or from an external source—be it a person, a pet, nature, or a higher power. And while gratitude lists are an oft-cited, evidence-based means of cultivating thankfulness, there's no single way to practice gratitude.

"I don't think research has pinpointed the exact prescription of what's going to make the most fixed, optimal gratitude intervention," said Glenn Fox, a gratitude researcher and professor at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.



"Pain, loss, and grief can give us a greater appreciation of life's blessings and their transience."

KELLY BARRON

Since making a gratitude list was a bust for me. I took comfort in Glenn's comment. I also was struck by the creative ways people practice gratitude. One of my friends said she stays appreciative by letting go of expectations and noticing what surprises and delights her each day. For others, gratitude practice is synonymous with giving.

LIVING WITH **GRATITUDE**

During the pandemic, Lena Edmond, a hospital chaplain in Oakland, felt called to help homeless people. She began making lunch bags, filling them with fried chicken, bread, bottled water, and sundries such as toothbrushes and hand sanitizer. She then drove around in her car, searching for unhoused people to feed. She's since formed a charity called Knee-Mail Ministries Inc. that provides lunch bags for hundreds of people without homes each month.

"When I'm giving, I'm grateful...

because I'm a blessing to somebody," she told me.

Inspired by Lena and others, I've begun experimenting. I've added thanks to my morning prayers. I tell people who make my daily life easier that I appreciate them-customer service representatives, the UPS Store clerk, my local barista. I've also volunteered as a literacy tutor.

Neuroscience motivates me to keep practicing gratitude. Research shows expressing gratitude increases activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, which plays a role in directing attention and changing our mental filter based on what's relevant to us.

Alex Korb, a neuroscientist at UCLA and author of the book The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time, likens the process to clicking on a Facebook ad that sets an algorithm to show you more advertisements for what you presumably like. When it happens on Facebook, it's annoying, but when it happens with gratitude it gives you more reasons to feel

good about your life.

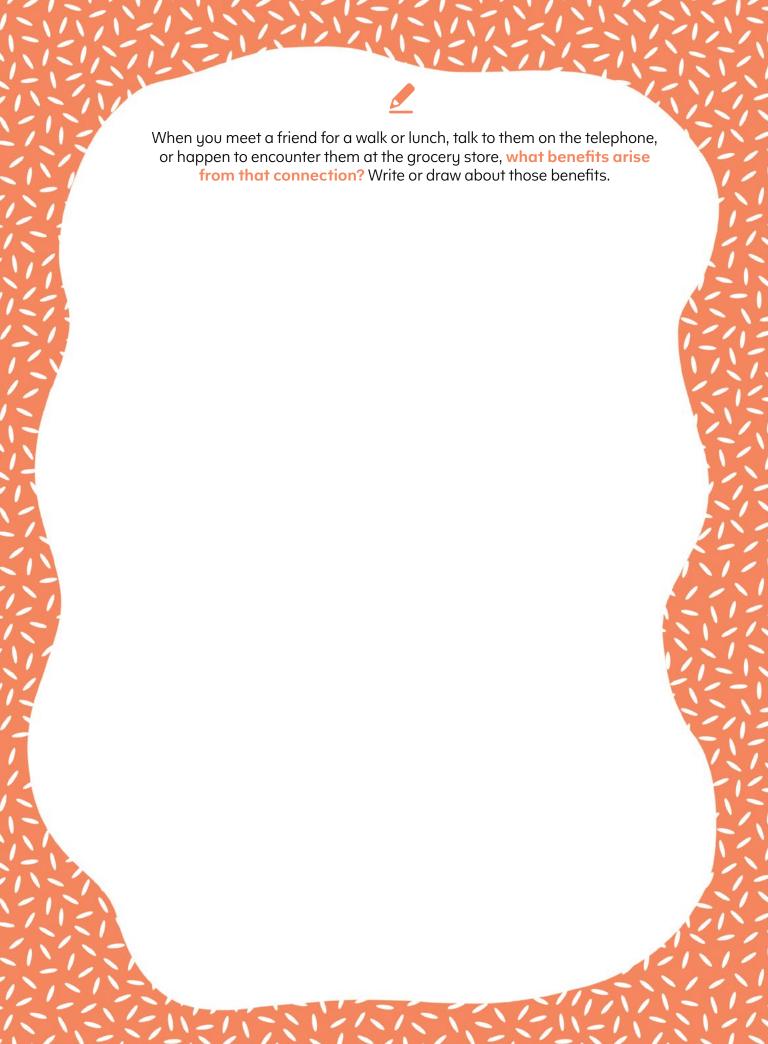
"By creating intentions and taking actions in certain directions, you're changing the way your brain perceives the world," said Korb.

He added that even though you might not feel warm and fuzzy when you acknowledge the benefit of running water flowing from your kitchen tap, cultivating gratitude enhances the chances of heartwarming feelings emerging over time.

Maybe it's my anterior cingulate cortex at work, but when I received my COVID-19 vaccine, I felt the warmth of gratitude standing in line with me. And as I write the last words of this story, I feel an upwelling of appreciation for the many ways I've learned to welcome gratitude into my life. I also feel grateful for you, dear reader. Thank you for your time and attention and

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lead with Gratitude

It takes a village to run the village. Here, we cultivate appreciation for all community members, including those we don't agree with.

by Shalini Bahl-Milne

What makes our communities thrive is not only the paid staff working for our towns and cities, but also hundreds of residents volunteering on boards and committees, in local nonprofits, and other organizations—not to mention countless individuals who jump in to help when there's a need.

One of the best (free!) tools for strengthening communities is gratitude. Research confirms gratitude enhances trust and empathy, nurturing cooperation and effective problem solving in communities. Practicing gratitude for each other also leads to upstream reciprocity, which means that gratitude increases our propensity not only to help someone who helped us, but also to "pay it forward" to strangers. Try this gratitude practice to help you notice, appreciate, and shift your mindset toward ways of being in community with others that benefit us all, while respecting our differences.



Appreciate others

with this guided practice from Shalini Bahl-Milne: mindful.org/lead-gratitude In this practice, you will be invited to extend gratitude to people or groups in your community belonging to three categories. Before we start the practice, recall a single person or a group from each of the following categories: A person or group you admire and like; a person or group you don't know well; a person or group with whom you often disagree.

Start by coming to a comfortable posture, alert yet relaxed. Lowering or closing your eyes, settle the mind on your breath moving naturally, in and out. If it's helpful, place your hand on the chest and notice as it rises and falls, connecting with your breath and your body.

Next, recall a person or group working in your community that you like. Think of the ways they serve your community. Now proceed to practice gratitude in three steps—Notice, Appreciate, and Shift.

Notice. Notice how it makes you feel when you consider the ways this person or these people benefit your community. Make space for whatever emerges.

Appreciate. From this place of kindness in yourself, extend gratitude to this person or people. Silently repeat, or use your own words: *I am grateful for the time*, energy, and gifts you bring to our community.

Shift. Explore how this gratitude practice might have shifted how you will listen, communicate, or relate with them, or if you'd like to take other actions to thank them. Or, simply thank them in your mind and move on to the next step.

- Next, recall a person or group working in your community whom you don't know well. Think of the ways they serve your community. Now repeat the three steps in the gratitude practice—Notice, Appreciate, and Shift.
- Lastly, recall a person or group working in your community with whom you tend to disagree. Although you disagree with them, can you see any gifts they bring to you or your community? Perhaps they bring a perspective you hadn't considered, or they're compelling the community to look at an important issue. Make space to see their contributions, then play with the three steps—Notice, Appreciate, and Shift.
- Before ending the practice, take a moment to appreciate your good intentions and commitment to lead with gratitude in all your actions and interactions in your community.

Transform Awareness into Action

A guided meditation for harnessing the power of grateful awareness to guide us as we co-create our emerging new reality and world together.

by MICHELLE MALDONADO

It is easy to feel a sense of overwhelm and confusion about how to engage with the world from a place of strength, groundedness, and calm. In this practice, we will explore how we show up in each of what I call the four transformation quadrants: self, family, community, and organizations. With each, we will meet whatever arises with self-compassion and curiosity.

To begin, silently set an intention for yourself to be open and curious about what comes up, receiving what arises with equanimity. You may sit or stand comfortably. Take three deep breaths in and out. Allow your mind, body, and breath to settle into their natural rhythm.

First, bring your attention to self-inquiry by gently placing a hand over the heart. This gesture often brings us comfort when we explore difficult thoughts, emotions, or experiences. See what you notice: perhaps the weight of your palm against your chest, or a temperature difference in the space underneath your palm.

Consider: How did I show up in the world today? How did my privilege show up through me? And what

actions can I take to help become more aware of my privilege and its impact on others? We are simply inviting reflection and introspection. Then, return your attention to the sensations of breathing.

Now, bring to mind the quadrant of family. For many, family is where we learned our values, our roles, and the lens through which we view life and others. With kindness and curiosity, consider what key values you learned from your family and how they might impact your views. Notice any sensations in your body. (If, at any time, this reflection becomes too difficult, please feel free to open your eyes, or pause/stop to honor self-care needs.)

Next, turn your attention to community. With whom do you tend to interact in your community? And with whom do you not interact? Why? Consider how you might show up differently in your community. Then return your attention to the breath.

Finally, consider the organizations in which or with whom you work.

You may have gleaned some insights about your privilege, the nature and impact of your presence, and how

family has shaped your perception and action. How do these factors influence how you show up in your work?

Notice where your lens of perception may need broadening or clarity. Is there a specific person or group of people that you hold with judgment and certainty? If so, bring them to mind and see if you can offer loving-kindness to help you shift from judgment and certainty to discernment, kindness, and curiosity. What do you notice? What do you feel in your body? What stories or mental narratives arise? What can you do differently to model and create a brave and safe space for all to flourish?

Taking three deep breaths in and out, let go of thoughts and bring your attention back to the sensation of your breath. As you close this meditation, you may wish to journal on what came up for you and what action steps you might take.

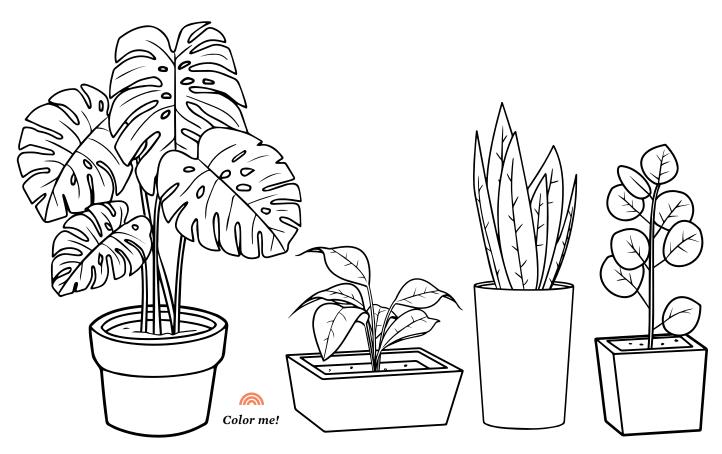


Create brave space in your heart with this guided practice from Michelle Maldonado: mindful.org/bridge





Bring to mind a time you had a positive interaction with strangers, from small talk in line at the grocery store to holding a door for someone, or giving someone directions on the street. Reflect on the feeling of being connected, even in a small way, to folks you don't know. Write or draw about that connection.



Uncover Joy

Try this reflection practice to explore how it feels to be part of a community both when it feels easy and natural, and when it presents difficulties.

by RHONDA MAGEE

Simply drop into being present in your body in this space, at this time. If it supports you in this practice to close your eyes, feel free to do so once you're in a comfortable position. Take a very deep, conscious breath and just allow yourself to have the sensation of sitting and breathing.

As you breathe in and out, call to mind an experience you've had of being in community. Let's recognize that being in community can be alluring, exciting, and something we desire, and it can also be very challenging. Call to mind a particular instance of being in community. You could work with your family-of-origin community, or a neighborhood community, for instance.

Think of a moment when you struggled to feel a sense of connection or a sense of belonging, of being understood, of being embraced by a particular community. If you find it possible, engage with that image of struggle and place yourself back in that circumstance as vividly as you can. If it's comfortable to do so, call forth the particularities of the sense of struggle you felt-the conflict, the way in which you felt in some way unable to feel fully at ease in this community.

As you breathe in and out, allow yourself to be reminded of what it feels like to struggle to feel in connection with others in community. Attend to this as completely as you can. What does it feel like in the body to allow what we have experienced, what we've actually felt like when we're not quite being understood or met or valued or received by others? Remember: whatever arises is utterly OK.

Gently hold the experience you're having with love and compassion.

This practice of allowing or accepting is truly an invitation to breathe in and out, and to allow any body signals or cues to come alive for you.

As you breathe in and out, invite a compassionate holding, a friendly recognition that we're just allowing all of this for now. We're not going to stay in this state forever. What we're doing is creating the capacity to be with the difficult challenges that arise in community. And to know that we've been there before, and have moved out of them, is very valuable as we deepen our capacity to engage in community with greater awareness.

Call to mind now a way in which you've moved out of struggle.

Perhaps you sense a simple opening up of awareness to what there is

beyond the struggle. Can you sense calm? Is there also a sense, simultaneously, that you belong? Can you detect a sense of joy, some understanding, even as you feel you're not being understood?

Focusing on the breath, see if there is any lingering sense of distress or challenge. Invite some self-compassion in to meet what you find. When we suffer—when anyone suffers—we deserve compassion.

Allow a sense of ease and a gentleness in holding what has arisen, noting whatever insights have emerged for you. Gently let go of these reflections, coming back fully to your body in this room, opening your eyes if they have been closed.

We've been practicing allowing our experience of being in community. It's not always easy to be in connection, and yet we're often invited to move through the difficulties to deepen our connection with others.



Lean in to struggle and uncover joy with this guided practice from Rhonda Magee: mindful.org/uncover-joy







WE CAN ONLY BE SAID TO BE ALIVE IN THOSE MOMENTS WHEN OUR HEARTS ARE CONSCIOUS OF OUR TREASURES

THORNTON WILDER

Tap Into Wisdom

Gratitude can open the door to developing other qualities such as patience and humility that work together with gratitude to enrich our experiences of life.

by MISTY PRATT

"Wisdom" isn't a precise term-

it frequently means different things to different people, and can be difficult to define at all. And yet, however divergent our interpretations, we tend to feel like we can recognize wisdom in another person (if not always in ourselves), and it can affect us profoundly. Gratitude has been associated with many qualities that we tend to see as markers of wisdom.

THE SCIENCE **Feed Wisdom**

People who are patient are less reactive and have more self-control, and research has linked gratefulness to a higher level of patience. In one study, people who had received help from someone during an experiment were more likely to experience gratitude throughout their week. After three weeks, the participants were offered the choice between an amount of cash immediately or a higher amount in the future. The people who felt more grateful were willing to wait longer for more cash. The researchers concluded that gratitude may act like a "self-control buffer," helping people to resist temptation and reap future rewards.

HOW IT WORKS See a Bigger Picture

"Because gratitude is about something that isn't earned by ourselves, it transcends our transactional process of what we've earned or what we think we're entitled to," says Greater Good Science Center Science Director Emiliana Simon-Thomas. "Somebody else or something out there created this goodness."

In a study from the PAW lab, participants were asked to either write gratitude letters or list the things they had done in the past two hours. Both groups were then asked to imagine that someone was angry with them and describe their reaction to that person. Those in the gratitude group wrote more humble responses to the angry person and were more likely to accept blame for their part in the disagreement. The researchers concluded that "humility and gratitude mutually predicted one another," creating a positive feedback loop. In other words, being grateful may encourage humility and vice versa.

Even with its variable interpretations, wisdom often refers to the quality of having insight, knowledge, and good judgment. One study found that people who were nominated by others as being

particularly wise expressed more feelings of gratitude in interviews with researchers than people who weren't singled out for their wisdom. The researchers wrote that "wisdom enables an appreciation of life and its experiences, especially the growth opportunities that may result from negative events."

WHY PRACTICE? **Shift Your Mood**

Mindfulness may be harder to quantify emotionally, with benefits accruing over a longer period of time. Research from the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison identifies a training-based framework of four areas where individuals can improve their own well-being: awareness, insight, purpose, and connection. The category of "connection" includes gratitude interventions such as compassion training, but there is a heavier focus on the quality of appreciation. However, lead author Cortland Dahl points out that mindfulness is the foundation for any training that people hope to do in these four areas of well-being. While it's possible mindfulness can enhance the benefits of gratitude, further research in this area is needed.



Deepen your Resilience

Three ways to start tuning in to what you need and carry that wisdom with you into the world.

by MICHELLE MALDONADO

Today's world can be not only

complex but also exhausting. Many of us spend much of our time feeling afraid, tired, confused, and worried. Fortunately, many people also are uncovering a common thread of goodness and spaciousness, finding they can breathe a little bit better and see a little more clearly in the most challenging moments. Whichever category you find yourself in, it's important to be OK with whatever you're feeling; to know it's OK to not feel OK. In this way, we more easily acknowledge and embrace where we are as we move with and through the world, aligning with whatever supports we need.

Paradox, prediction, and percep-

tion are three words I like to use to describe how we move through the world, especially during a really difficult time. When we encounter things that don't make sense to us, our brain approaches them as paradoxes as it tries to understand those encounters. When we think about all the divisiveness happening in the world today, we might be trying to process it all and make sense of what feels like a paradox. Our brains pull from our limited life experiences and make predictions about the future and potential outcomes, and then we, essentially, live the future outcomes we expect. Finally, our perception is informed by all those life experiences and

predictions, even while we're still processing them.

What is my perception right now? What experiences and predictions are informing my perception? How am I holding space for all that? Am I standing in hopelessness? Anger? Exhaustion? Excitement? Curiosity? Joy? Am I anticipating what might be? Or perhaps feeling all of the above and more? This is just another reason our practice and self-care are so important, because if we don't notice the inner conditions that inform our perceptions, we miss the opportunity to embrace, question, challenge, or even disrupt our perceptions that may be resulting in misperceptions. →

ARIIA / ADOBE STOCK

"Our perception is informed by all our life experiences and predictions, even while we're processing them."

MICHELLE MALDONADO

THREE WAYS TO ROOT DEEPLY IN YOUR WISDOM

When engaging in self-care, we can set the intention to acknowledge what's going well in our lives-and what's feeling good—and what may not be going quite so well or feeling nourishing to our bodies, our minds, and the world around us. By holding space for it all, we allow ourselves to perceive the bigger picture and where we might benefit from adjusting our activities, our habits, or our views in order to truly show ourselves the kindness embodied by self-care. Here are three ways I remind myself to sense my own needs and the growth points present in this moment, and how I let them inspire my evolving self-care practices.

Reflect on what kind of self-care you need in this moment. Specifically, see if you

need to go beyond your go-to activities. In what ways have you engaged in self-care when you felt pressured? Did it work? And if not, is it a matter of increasing the duration or the frequency of your self-care activity? Or is there an opportunity to introduce other types of self-care? For example, I would often go sit outside in the woods and medi-

tate, or just sit there and listen to the sounds of nature. At some point during the pandemic, my usual selfcare practices just weren't enough. So I decided to mix it up and began hiking in a national park, near a waterfall. I'm a very big water person, and hiking in the woods with the sound of the rushing water by my side helps me feel grounded and allows me to put down of all my mental clutter for a little while, so I can simply rest. During the pandemic, I also found that I needed to take more frequent, short walks in my neighborhood throughout the week. All of this helped me feel the reset that I needed.

Be present with your body's cues and signals. Paying attention to the body is a gift we give ourselves, because the body doesn't lie. It's important for us to notice, pay attention to, and acknowledge how we're feeling. So much of how we experience our way through life is a felt sense in the body, and yet we don't often pay attention to our body. What happens in the body can give us information to support our choices and help us create a skillful response to the world around us.

If your body is not feeling well, give it some ease and grace as you process and acknowledge, instead of pushing away the feeling. Try

not to be critical of yourself because you're thinking or feeling a particular way. It is as it is. And it's OK. From there, how do you get to where you wish to be? Do you need support from friends or family? Do you need support from a professional therapist or counselor? My father used to offer this piece of wisdom: "There's no way to it but through it."

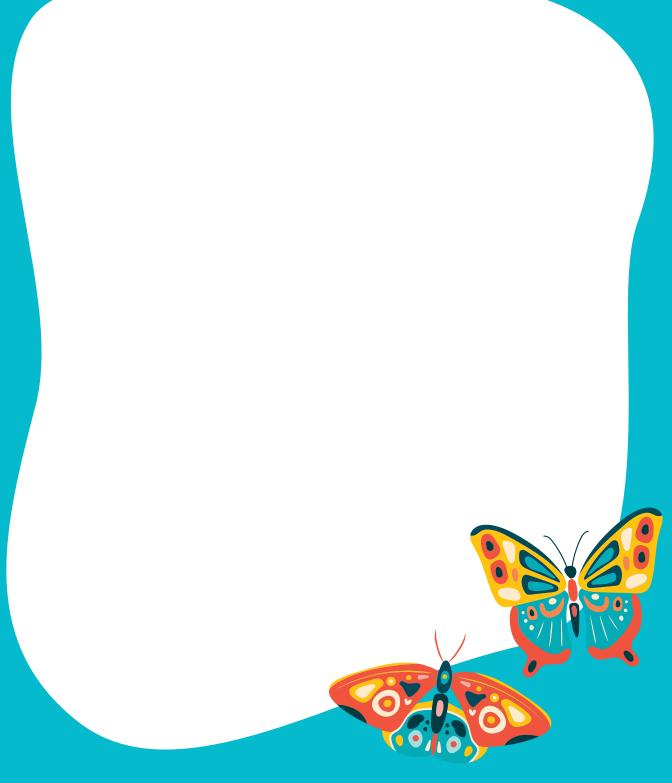
Challenge your assumptions and biases. If we aren't careful, we add to divisiveness, we add to exhaustion, and we add to expressions of bias, when we let our unexamined assumptions guide us. And there are plenty of opportunities to catch ourselves doing this in regular conversation. When you start to move into this role of taking action and challenging assumptions, you may not see the result you want right away. But when you reflect later on conversations you've had in the past day or two, you might notice a shift.

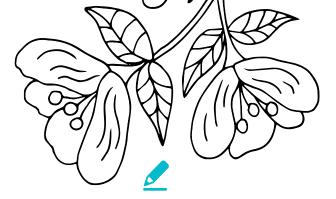
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Maldonado is coauthor of A Bridge To Better: An Open Letter To Humanity & Resource Guide, and founder of Lucenscia, a firm dedicated to human flourishing and mindful business transformation. She is a certified mindfulness and emotional intelligence teacher and practitioner.



Whose wisdom do you admire most? What knowledge of yourself have you arrived at through observing someone else's wisdom in action? Write or draw about how you've experienced wisdom in others.





What does wisdom mean to you? What are the qualities that lead to wisdom? How have you tapped into your own wisdom, through compassion, loving-kindness, patience, balance, or something else?

What does wisdom feel like in your body? What does it look like in the world? Write or draw what comes to mind.



Gratitude for Small Things

We can uncover the wisdom of gratitude by noticing small things to be grateful for, then opening our awareness to the truth that everything and everyone—no matter how small—is interconnected.

by STEVE HICKMAN

We often find ourselves focusing primarily on what we want but don't have, which cultivates a negative state of mind. What would it be like to let go of needing anything to be any different in this moment, and to open up to what's actually here that may bring joy?

One aspect of wisdom is understanding the complexity of a situation—appreciating how every event arises interdependently with every other event, how a whole sequence of causes and conditions have gone into creating this moment. When we practice gratitude, we feel a sense of the common humanity that we share but often forget.

In the words of the poet Mark Nepo, "One key to knowing joy is being easily pleased." We can engage this joy with the following practice from the Mindful Self-Compassion Program, developed by Chris Germer and Kristin Neff.

Look for small joys with this guided practice from Steve Hickman: mindful.org/small-things First, take some time to make a list, perhaps writing it down, or a mental list, whatever allows you to make some space to consider what you are grateful for and perhaps often overlook, wherever you happen to be. Focus on the small and seemingly insignificant things. Maybe you notice the smell of coffee in the morning. A particular view that you are fond of. The texture of a blanket, a genuine smile from your beloved. Buttons.

Let yourself savor each item on your list. Let it land, noticing what it can be like to simply acknowledge your gratitude, becoming "easily pleased." I find myself feeling gratitude for fresh water that flows out of the tap and into the drain in a heartbeat, but brings joy, brings satisfaction, allows me to wash my hands or to have a drink of water. In a moment, it's gone.

Consider the infinite sources of those little things you feel grateful for. Water is beautiful, but what of that water, where did it come from? It fell from the sky and gathered in creeks and streams, then rivers and lakes, and perhaps evaporated and rained again, and gathered somewhere, and entered into pipes that came to my house and let the water out of the tap and into the drain, and was gone. All of the people, all of the causes and conditions, the construction, the gathering, the forces of nature that converged for this one moment: What are you grateful for? To whom are you grateful?

This is a practice you can do any time, on a regular basis. For now, how do you feel? What do you notice is present for you right now? Do you notice any joy, any comfort? Savor that.

If anything unpleasant arises—perhaps you're feeling badly because you're not feeling enough gratitude, or the feeling doesn't bring you as much joy as you would like—could you let go of that? Could you acknowledge your intentions to simply open up to things in your environment that you're grateful for? Let go of needing to have a certain feeling. Pat yourself on the back for having intentionally let go of striving for at least a little while, and know that this practice can build on itself with time. We allow ourselves to be easily pleased, and let gratitude land. Could it soften and warm our hearts, our experience? Our way of encountering the world?

Embody Connection

In this soothing body scan practice, we soften into the embodied knowledge that we are always connected to ourselves and to those around us.

by GHYLIAN BELL

Find a comfortable place to sit, lie, or stand. I invite you to close your eyes or bring your gaze low until a crease of light shines through.

Notice what's coming up for you, what the body is aware of right now. What are you feeling? Notice how your body is breathing. No judgment, just observation.

Breathe through the nose deeply-

to the top of the breath. Release the breath and soften. Expel all the air from your lungs until you reach the bottom of the breath. Remember who you are, what you stand for, and what's beneath the surface of your being: the interconnected self.

Honor the feet that support you.

Notice your feet and what's beneath them. Soften the feet. Breathe and surrender.

Soften the ankles and calves. Feel

the vibration from the ground drawing up the legs and softening the knees and thighs.

Soften the hips and buttocks.

Surrender the body. Allow the body to breathe. Release the belly and notice the lower back and sacrum. Breathe in light and space there.

Feel the breath open the mind.

Relax the belly, the seat of the gut, that is connected to the sacrum, the seat of the nervous system. Feel the breath. Soften. Feel the torso breathing with fullness, as the heart rises with deep love, and surrender.

Soften the spine. Release tension in the back. Feel your arms get heavy, as the weight is released from the shoulders. Feel the neck lengthen as the arms draw down.

Soften the fingers—representing the details of life. Release the palms of your hands. What do you hold on to? Surrender, soften, breathe.

Release the wrists and forearms.

Soften the elbows, biceps, and triceps. Breathe. Feel lightness in your arms, the tool of your embrace. What do you embrace? Breathe and soften.

Surrender the body. Free the mind. You are not your body. The body is a tool. How do you use it?

Relax and open the throat. Release tension in the jaw and the mouth. How do you use your mouth in language? Soften the mouth. Honor the words that come through with intention and action. Release the face and jaw.

Bring awareness to the ears. Pay

attention to what you hear and take in. Surrender. Feel the body breathing. Bring awareness to the eyes. Soften the eyelids and the eyebrows. Bring attention to what you see. Soften and know the heart is listening.

The breath is a tool, to help us soften the body and remember who we are. The breath is a symbol: a symbol of this movement of interconnectedness.

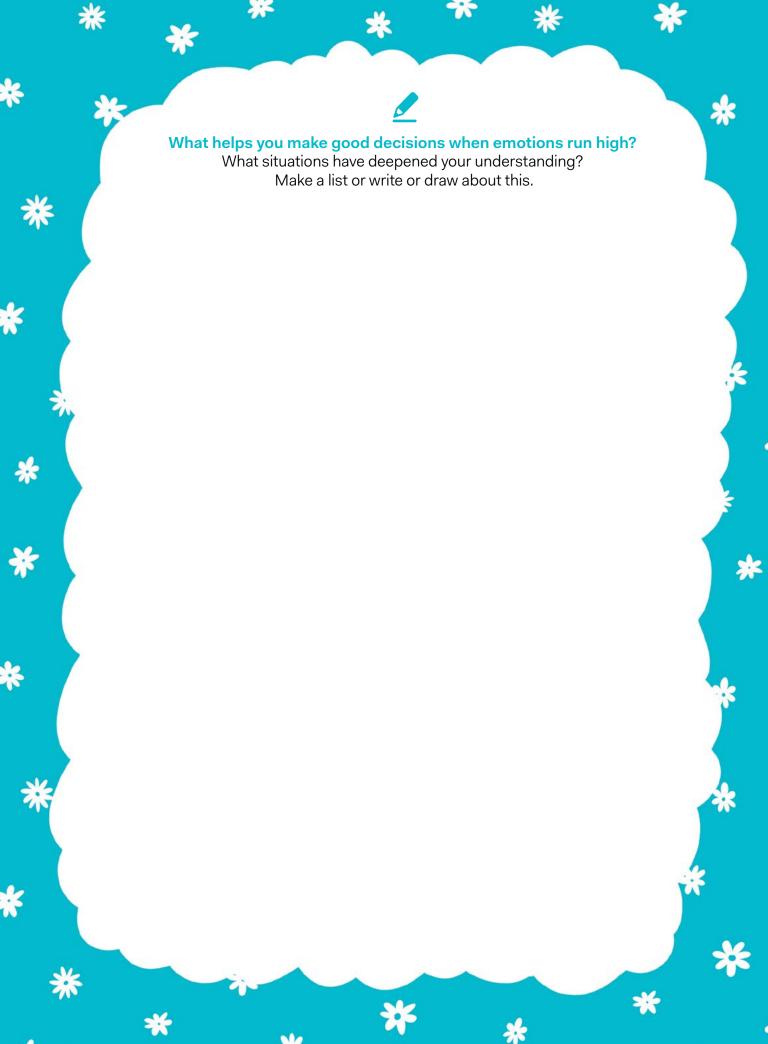
Feel the body breathing, interconnected, and still. This is a movement. Remember who you are.
Remember what's beneath you and surrender to the higher sense of self.
We are all interconnected.

Deepen the breath. Inhale through the nose and exhale with a soft sound. Repeat this two more times. Hold the breath. Hold and then release. Remembering what you stand for: the interconnectedness of us. If you wish, you may end by bringing both palms together toward your heart.



Breathe interconnectedness

with this practice from Ghylian Bell: mindful.org/interconnected



Sometimes we need to talk about difficulties with close friends and family. When have you received advice that helped you navigate a difficult conversation? Write or draw your way through that memory.

MAGDALENA / ADOBE STOCK

Cultivate Fierce Receptivity

When we welcome everything—good, bad, neutral—we are less likely to rush to judgment, and this gives us more choices for what we do in our lives.

by Frank Ostaseski

To welcome something doesn't mean we have to like it. It doesn't mean we have to agree with it. It just means we have to be willing to meet it. To welcome something asks us to temporarily suspend our rush to judgment and just be open to what's occurring.

For most of us, when uncertainty shows its face, our response is resistance. We want to get rid of these difficult experiences like unwanted houseguests. But our work really is to welcome them in, to include them in our meditation practice, in life. Welcoming everything. Wishing away nothing.

When I encourage receptivity here I'm not suggesting that we should let life walk all over us-not at all. I think when we welcome something it gives us options. We can get to know it. We can find a skillful response to whatever's emerging. The great African-American writer James Baldwin said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

- Come into the breath and body. Maybe let your eyes close, if that feels comfortable for you. Let your breathing be very natural.
- Begin by being aware of the various sensations in your body: pressure, movement, tingling; the feel of the air on your hands and face. Let the sounds come and go. For a moment, see if you can let go of the idea of arms and legs and a body. Just feel the waves of sensation.
- Become aware of the area above your head. How far does it extend? Let your awareness sense what's to the left of you, what's to the right of you. Let awareness come into the area below your body. Is there any vibration in your feet or the floor? Let your awareness extend to the area behind your body until it fills the whole room. Let your awareness be aware of what's in front of the body—extending out as far as it possibly can.
- In this expanding awareness, meet this sense of openness: boundless space. And all the activities of body, of heart, of mind are appearing and disappearing in that open, welcoming space. Allow all experience to arise without any interference—no inside, no outside. Relax your ownership of thoughts. You can see the difference between being lost in thought and being mindful of thought. It's like when a sound occurs in the room or a bird flies by. You just notice the sound of the bird. You don't think it's you. Let it be that way with your thoughts and sensations: everything coming, everything going in a vast, open space.
- Finally, let your attention come to the awareness itself. Vast, transparent, clear, not disturbed by anything that's coming and going. Welcome everything. Wish away nothing.



Expand your receptiveness with this guided practice from Frank Ostaseski: mindful.org/receptivity

THE SCIENCE OF GRATITUDE

What Are You Grateful For?

As research continues to illuminate the benefits we gain from gratitude, all that's left is for us to allow this simple, heart-opening practice to take shape in our own lives—and see where it leads.

by MISTY PRATT

A rich body of research in the field of social sciences has found overall significant benefits of gratitude for well-being, physical health, personal relationships, and social connections. Gratitude can open the door to a different perspective—one that values the goodness in our lives. With practice, we can learn to see the bigger picture and navigate adversity with greater resilience.

Gratitude is not defined by privilege, nor is it a naïve or indulgent practice of being happy for material things. Instead, it helps us to see that our full potential can only be realized with the help of others. Practiced in this way, gratitude can be a tool to tackle social and environmental injustices, by strengthening our feelings of worth and value in relation to one another. Grateful living encourages patience, respect, and kindness; qualities that are the building blocks of both a healthy society and a world where everyone is given the opportunity not only to survive, but to flourish.





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What brings you joy?
What helps you love yourself fully?
Who helps you remember your kindness?
What are you grateful for? May you find space to tune in to the moments, big and small, that nourish your heart.



