

GRATITUDE

What is gratitude? Why is it important?

Everything is a gift. The degree to which we are awake to this truth is a measure of our gratefulness, and that gratefulness is a measure of our aliveness.

Thich Nhat Hahn

When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude.

Elie Wiesel

Gratitude is not only the memory but the homage the heart renders to God for his goodness.

Nathaniel Parker Willis

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

William Arthur Ward

I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.

Gilbert K. Chesterton

Cultivating gratitude

Sometimes we get reminders . . .

The Traveling Onion, by Naomi Shihab Nye

When I think how far the onion has traveled
just to enter my stew today, I could kneel and praise
all small forgotten miracles,
crackly paper peeling on the drainboard,
pearly layers in smooth agreement,
the way knife enters onion
and onion falls apart on the chopping block,
a history revealed.

And I would never scold the onion
for causing tears.
It is right that tears fall
for something small and forgotten.
How at meal, we sit to eat,
commenting on texture of meat or herbal aroma
but never on the translucence of onion,
now limp, now divided,
or its traditionally honorable career:
For the sake of others,
disappear.

Sometimes gratitude is all around . . .

At the age of 18, I made up my mind to never have another bad day in my life. I dove into an endless sea of gratitude from which I've never returned.

Patch Adams

And sometimes we must go searching for gratitude . . .

In a group that I taught recently, there was a man who spoke up whose son and daughter-in-law had become meth addicts. They were both addicts to the point where he and his wife had to take and raise their grandchildren. After a moment of great despair, he began to do a gratitude practice to see what he could be grateful for.

He was grateful to have the grandchildren, grateful that his son and his wife were still alive and that they were considering treatment. He was grateful for the depths of compassion that had grown when he learned about the prevalence of addiction in this country and that he could somehow contribute to bringing and end to it. He said that by being able to find

gratitude, he was able to bear the difficulties and bring some grace and love to his circumstances.

Jack Kornfield, quoted in *The Huffington Post*

More on cultivating gratitude . . .

Our mind can recognize a gift as gift, but only our heart can rise to gratefulness.

What counts is prayerfulness, not prayers. And the fullness of prayerfulness is grateful living.

David Steindl-Rast, from *Gratefulness: The Heart of Prayer*

Contemplative Steindl-Rast is the author of numerous books on gratitude. His website, gratefulness.org, is a growing collection of resources for cultivating gratitude.

Source of All Blessings,
You bless us with breath.
In and out, in and out, ever
Renewing us, ever anew making us
One with all who breathe the same
Air, may this blessing overflow
Into a shared gratefulness, so that
With one breath I may praise and
Celebrate life.

From *99 Blessings: An Invitation to Life*

Conversation starters

1. What comes to mind when you think of gratitude? Are you surprised? What happens when you get really specific?
2. How do you express gratitude? Do you sometimes feel gratitude without expressing it? What holds you back?
3. Have you offered and received expressions of gratitude that stand out in your mind? What made them special?
4. How does All Souls contribute to your living a life that expresses gratitude?