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## PAYING ATTENTION AND GRATITUDE

Gratitude sets up a positive vibration within us. Esther Hicks says in her book, 'Ask and It Is Given:' that the vibration of appreciation is the most powerful connection between the physical you and the outside world. She says that it's not even necessary to understand the law of attraction to get results. The simple act of gratitude and appreciation causes all things you desire to start flowing into your experience. The big dreams start to materialize. Sometimes in life, we think everything has to be hard. We're not even willing to try the simple things, the things that really work, because it's outside our experience.

Give yourself permission to be a beginner. Growth must have time to solidify into health. Getting excited about life can sometimes seem elusive when we're dealing with many challenges and the associated stress. *Gratitude as an expressive activity excites life - it's more than just acknowledging thanks, it's a state of being that appreciates all that is good and welcomed in our life.* With a focus and attention on gratitude each day, the experience of it in your body, in your being, heightens a sense of energy that could be thought of as **aliveness**. Gratitude is more than intellectual exercise. It is much more than an obligation. *Expressing appreciation involves both an expressive action and an inner attitude. Gratitude appreciates from the mind through intentional thought that recognizes the richness of our emotional connections with others, and all good things that bless our lives.*

### 5 ways of Experiencing Gratitude

1) **Gratitude as a way of seeing.** The only problem with all these great discoveries in favor of gratitude is that appreciation and gratitude are not like mental faucets that we can just turn on at will. Gratefulness has two sides. Expressing gratitude is partly a conscious action, like opening a door or telling a story. It is also a result of deep attitudes: *the way we look at our lives* and *the way we turn the events of our lives into meaningful stories*. Parents teach their children to say "thank you," the action part, in the hope that their children will grow into the attitude part. For adults, the path toward gratitude includes an exploration of both. If we are resentful we cannot experience gratitude. Trying to express gratitude out of duty to another is misplaced and misdirected. Gratitude isn't about what you are giving another. Gratitude is about you - being in gratitude - and what it gives you. This again requires that some attention and focus must be given to the negative thoughts that are preventing the beautiful and powerful experience of gratitude.

**2) Stories, suffering and gratitude.** Human beings need to make sense out of what can be a bewildering variety of life experiences. Life is not consistent. Joy comes one day, sorrow the next. Success alternates with failure. Sometimes our efforts matter a lot and sometimes it is a matter of luck, good or bad. One of the main ways we bring coherence to this mind-boggling variety is to develop our own personal organizing “themes” such as “my life of adventure” or “my struggle with ....” Since no one theme can hold all the events in our lives, we pick out and emphasize the experiences that illustrate our main theme and let all the other events fade into the background. Most people do not consciously pick their themes. We more often borrow them from our parents, or are pushed into them by powerful events in our lives such as love, war, abuse, success or failure. A former soldier might weave his life story around the theme of “I went to Vietnam and got totally messed up.” Another soldier from the same combat unit might organize his life around the theme “In my family we get through difficult times by staying close.” These two men might have experienced the same horrors of war, but their different themes are going to keep them *looking for* and *paying attention to* different kinds of experiences in the present. What you focus on, grows.

**3) Exploring a new theme: Receiving each day as a gift.** Becoming aware that our themes emphasize some events in our lives and ignore many others can be a real jolt. This conscious work on developing a new story will make it easier for us to see opportunities for appreciation in all our daily environments (work, home, community). One possible first step in receiving each day as a gift is to think of *any* days in your life that have felt like gifts or blessings. This can be even more helpful if you write down these wonderful times as part of developing a journal of gratitude. Slowly, over weeks and months, you can begin to feel out an alternative way of telling the story of your life.

**4) Thank you equals yes to life.** Another possible step in cultivating a grateful heart is to look for small ways to say thank you to total strangers. When you are in a restaurant and the food tastes good, say something about it to the person who is serving you. When I get out of the dentist’s chair, I thank the person who has just spent half an hour of their life trying with great effort and discipline to make sure that my teeth stay in my head. The possibilities are endless. Experiencing, or feeling the energy of gratitude fully in the body is as important as the mental focus on those things you are grateful for. The bodily experience will arrive with consistent mental focus, capturing the negative thoughts and replacing them with a positive thought, preferably combined within the context of gratitude. As you can see, this is not an exercise of obligatory duty, offering kindness, thanks, etc., out of a sense of responsibility to others. This is an act for your own freedom and well-being. The practice of thanking people whenever you get the chance is a way of **saying yes to life in small installments.**

**5) Expressing gratitude in the middle of a difficult life.** Considered on a wider level, (seemingly more prevalent in wealthy self absorbed material countries such as North America - if you have had the fortune to have visited an oppressed or poverty stricken country, you may have noticed that people may not have much material wise, however, they radiate joy and/or

take action to work toward alleviating their oppression) part of the problem of suffering and oppression is that people who are oppressed tend to become obsessed with the source of their suffering. Whether the oppressing force is nuclear weapons, a negative parent, a chronic illness or a boss in a sweatshop, the oppressor tends to become the central feature in the oppressed person's life story. In this context, the practice of gratitude can be seen as a deep resistance to having one's life taken over.