

Gratitude: Awakening the Heart

“The eyes of my eyes are opened.” ~ E. E. Cummings

Has this ever happened to you? You pick up a book and a sentence leaps off the page as if it had been written just for you. Or you hear a revelation in the lyrics of a song. Sometimes an angel seems to whisper in your ear.

One ordinary morning I realized I was emotionally and physically exhausted from concentrating on things I wanted to buy but couldn't afford. I felt trapped in a vicious circle. The more I focused on lack and on what I couldn't have, the more depressed I became. The more depressed I became, the more I focused on lack. My soul whispered that what I really yearned for was not financial security but financial serenity. I was still — quiet enough to listen. At that moment I acknowledged the deep longing in my heart. What I hungered for was an inner peace that the world could not take away. I asked for help and committed to following wheresoever Spirit would lead me. For the first time in my life I discarded my five-year goals and I became a seeker, a pilgrim, a sojourner.

When I surrendered my desire for security and sought serenity instead, I looked at my life with open eyes. I saw that I had much for which to be grateful. I felt humbled by my riches and regretted that I took for granted abundance that already existed in my life. How could I expect more from the Universe when I didn't appreciate what I already had?

Immediately I made an inventory of my life's assets: my health, a wonderful husband, a beautiful and happy daughter, their health, our home (small but comfortable), and three precious pets who daily bring me faithful companionship and great joy. There's always plenty of good food on the table and wine in the pantry. We are also blessed with many wonderful friends who care deeply about us and share in our lives.

Once I started, my list grew. I loved my work; it was being sent out into the world and had been well received. Many women had let me know that my first book had enriched their lives. I truly believe that what you give to world will be returned to you — maybe not all at once or in the way you expect it — but if you give your very best, the very best will come back to you. Now was the moment to live my beliefs.

When I looked at my life's ledger I realized I was a very rich woman. What I was experiencing was merely a temporary cash-flow problem. Finally, I came to an inner awareness that my personal net worth couldn't possibly be determined by the size of my checking account balance. Neither can yours.

It doesn't matter how awareness arrives. What matters is that it comes. My heart began to overflow with gratefulness. I started giving thanks for everything: daisies in a Jelly jar on my kitchen windowsill, the sweet fragrance of my daughter's hair, the first sip of tea in the morning, pork with apples and cranberries for Sunday supper, hearing the words “love you” before I went to sleep. Each day began to offer me authentic moments of pleasure and contentment. But hadn't they before? The difference was that I was now

noticing and appreciating each day's gifts. The power gratefulness caught me by surprise.

All I ask you to do today is to open ‘the eyes of your eyes” and give your life another glance. Are your basic needs met? Do you have a home? Food on the table? Clothes to wear? Is there a regular paycheck coming in? Do you have dreams? Do you have your health? Can you walk, talk, see the beauty that surrounds you, listen to music that stirs your soul or makes your feet want to boogie? Do you have family and friends whom you love, and who love you?

Then pause for a moment and give thanks. Let your heart awaken to the transforming power of gratefulness. Be open to exchanging your need for emotional and financial security for serenity. “No trumpets sound when the important decisions of our life are made,” Agnes de Mille reminds us. “Destiny is made known silently.”

The Gratitude Journal

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.” ~ Melody Beattie

There are several tools that I'm going to suggest you use as you begin your inner exploration. While all of them will help you become happier and more content and will nurture your creativity, this first tool could change the quality of your life beyond belief: it's what I call a daily gratitude journal. I have a beautiful blank book and each night before I go to bed, I write down five things that I can be grateful about that day. Some days my list will be filled with amazing things, most days, just simple joys. “Mikey got lost in a fierce storm but I found him shivering, wet but unharmed. I listened to Puccini while cleaning and remembered how much I love opera.”

Other days - rough ones - I might think that I don't have five things to be grateful for, so I'll write down my basics: my health, my husband and daughter, their health, my animals, my home, my friends, and the comfortable bed that I'm about to get into, as well as the fact that the day's over. That's okay. Real life isn't always going to be perfect or go our way, but the recurring acknowledgment of what *is working* in our lives can help us not only survive but surmount our difficulties.

The gratitude journal has to be the first step on the Simple Abundance path or it just won't work for you. Simplicity, order, harmony, beauty, and joy — all the other principles that can transform your life will not blossom and flourish without gratitude. If you want to travel this journey with me, the *gratitude journal is not an option*.

Why? Because you simply will not be the same person two months from now after consciously giving thanks each day for the abundance that exists in your life. And you will have set in motion an ancient spiritual law: the more you have and are grateful for, the more will be given you.

I have told you that the Simple Abundance path is a transformative process. We're going to work on one principle for two months at a time, trying to weave that principle

into the fabric of our daily life.

Let's begin today with gratitude. Select the prettiest, most inviting blank book you can find for your gratitude journal. Make a pleasant outing for its selection. Note the fabric or design of the cover. The look and feel of the paper. Do you prefer ruled pages or blank? Perhaps you can find one with a ribbon clasp. One of the most valuable lessons Simple Abundance has taught me is that it is in the smallest details that the flavor of life is savored.

As the months pass and you fill your Journal with blessings, an inner shift in your reality will occur. Soon you will be delighted to discover how content and hopeful you are feeling. As you focus on the abundance rather than on the lack in your life, you will be designing a wonderful new blueprint for the future. This sense of fulfillment is gratitude at work, transforming your dreams into reality.

A French proverb reminds us that "Gratitude is the heart's memory. Begin this day to explore and integrate this beautiful, life - affirming principle into your life, and the miracle you have been seeking will unfold to your wonder and amazement.

Sarah Ban Breathnach
Simple Abundance
A Daybook of Comfort and Joy