

THE HEALING

POWER OF GRATITUDE

A SPECIAL REPORT IN THE
LESS STRESS SURGERY GUIDED IMAGERY
RELAXATION PROGRAM



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The Healing Power of Gratitude

In this special report, I discuss the healing power of gratitude and the many ways that it can improve our physical and spiritual health. The expression of gratitude calms our overactive nervous system and reduces the flow of stress hormones into our body. In addition to reducing anxiety, gratitude also gives us a sense of spiritual well-being that not only improves our mood but also helps us to make healthier choices in our lives. If we could bottle all the beneficial qualities that the expression of gratitude brings and put them in a pill, I would prescribe this miraculous medicine for all of my patients.

Gratitude Is An Attitude

In her wonderful book, *The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude*, Sarah Ban Breathnach tells the delightful story of two farmers, both poor, who were walking along an old country road, when they passed by their beloved rabbi.

To the first farmer, the rabbi endearingly said, 'Times are tough, my dear friend. How are you doing?' 'Awful,' replied the farmer. 'The economy is bad. I barely have food for my family. And it looks like the rains will never arrive. Life is lousy.'

Now God happened to be eavesdropping on this conversation and thought to himself, 'Lousy, eh? I'll show you what lousy is!'

The rabbi then asked the second farmer, 'So, my friend, how are you doing in these difficult times?' 'Great, Rabbi! Things couldn't be better. Every day brings new joy and blessings with my friends and family. I'm so grateful for the gift that each day brings, for I know, rain or shine, all will unfold as God, in his infinite greatness knows best.'

The man's deep gratitude soared into the celestial spheres to resonate with the harmony of the heavenly hosts. God, hearing the farmer's gracious response, smiled with delight, 'Good? You think your life is good now? I'll show you what good is!'

At any time in our lives when we are facing difficulties or fears, it is vitally important to take a moment to be mindful of the many blessings we enjoy in life: family, friends, a roof over our heads, a car that runs, a warm shower in the morning and food on our tables. These simple blessings represent a level of abundance that enriches us far beyond the level of countless other less fortunate people, who live in poverty and pain, cold and hunger, with few to no material comforts.

In The Pursuit Of More, We May End Up With Less

We all--so easily--gravitate towards what is lacking in our lives, towards the difficulties we face and the disappointments we must endure. Our appetite for 'more' is insatiable. We want the newest car, the biggest house, the finest food, the fastest computer and the highest six-figure salary possible. In the pursuit of more, however, we end up with less. We lose our connection to

what is truly important in our lives. We lose precious time with family and friends. We lose a sense of calm and serenity. We lose the simple joy of living. We lose an appreciation of our many blessings. In these matters, the spiritual scales concur that more is sometimes less.

Our body pays a heavy price for our indulgence in 'more.' In the endless pursuit of material comfort and gain, we forget to exercise, eat fast food and ignore our body's need for sleep, play and relaxation. Our body becomes locked in a permanent state of 'fight or flight,' spilling toxic stress hormones into our bloodstream and tissues. In this toxic spill, we suffer from autoimmune disorders, chronic fatigue, irritable bowel syndrome, headaches and allergies.

Gratitude Balances Our Insatiable Hunger For More

Gratitude balances our insatiable hunger for 'more,' allowing us a critical time-out to appreciate what we have. The heart must beat, then pause to fill up, then beat again in order to fulfill its destiny. Gratitude is the pause between beats, the vital time for 'filling up' that allows our soul to fulfill its destiny. In gratitude, we nurture our soul and purify our body.

As we express our gratitude this holiday season, remember that gratitude is one of those few, special things in life that increases as we give it away. Most things in life are diminished as we give them away. For instance, if we take a delicious pumpkin pie and give a quarter of it away, we are left with only three-quarters, less than our original whole. Gratitude, however, is different.

Gratitude Is Like The Flame Of A Candle: As We Give It Away, The Illumination Increases

Gratitude is an energy of the spiritual world, more like the flame of a candle. As we 'give away' our flame by lighting other candles, the amount of light--or gratitude--we experience increases. In fact, with our single flame, we can light an unlimited number of other candles, helping to illuminate the world with our gratitude. The more we are grateful for--that is, the more we 'give away' our flame--the greater the light we have with which to see the many truly wondrous gifts we have to be grateful for.

We Express Our Gratitude Fully Through Both Words And Deeds

We can express our gratitude--and light another's candle--in two main ways:

1. Through words
2. Through deeds

Gentle and encouraging words of thanks, praise or appreciation touch the heart of another, igniting their flame and enlightening their life. Charitable deeds and acts of loving kindness, through the fire of their intent, also light another's candle.

The esteemed Chassidic teacher Rabbi Menachem Schneerson in his book *In The Garden of the Torah* (p. 133), teaches this Talmudic passage:

'A person who gives a coin to a poor person is granted six blessings; one who gratifies him is blessed elevenfold.' (Talmud: Bava Basra 9b)

What we mean by 'gratifies' is giving a person a positive feeling about him or herself--showing that we truly care about them as a fellow human being. Though giving charity to the poor is an admirable form of gratitude, expressing a deep sense of appreciation and love for another person is a form of gratitude that returns even greater blessings.

We must remember to render gratitude both **through deeds**: giving to the poor and needy, helping the elderly cross the street, visiting the sick in the hospital; and **through words**: telling others we love them, expressing our appreciation to friends and speaking kindly towards others. We can also express our gratitude to God through both deeds: following his commandments, studying his word, practicing kindness and charity towards others; and through words: praising God through prayer and meditation for all the goodness he bestows upon us.

Take A Moment Today To Express Your Gratitude--In Both Word And Deed--To Someone You Love

Let us nurture our body and nurture our soul this Thanksgiving and holiday season by expressing our appreciation to all those we love and care for, as well as to all those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Do so in both words and in deed. In this way, we will realize the true spirit of this season, by helping to make the world a kinder, more loving and more beautiful world in which to live.

Additional Inspirational Passage

'Once we accept that abundance and lack are parallel realities and that each day we choose--consciously or unconsciously--which world we will inhabit, a deep inner shift in our reality occurs. We discover the sacred in the ordinary and we realize that every day is literally a gift.'

Sarah Ban Breathnach

I hope that this special report will truly help you find a deeper sense of gratitude in your life. When we are better able to acknowledge the many gifts we have in our lives, our immune system is strengthened and our healing system is activated. Wishing you all the very best in your upcoming surgery. Sincerely,



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Personal Note: After I originally wrote this report, it started me thinking what I could personally do to express my sense of gratitude. As a result, I decided that—every year—as a small token of my gratitude—I would personally give a five dollar bill to every patient I saw in my office the day before Thanksgiving and ask them to donate the money to someone who needed it more than they did, as a token of our appreciation for all the goodness we enjoy in our lives. I have continued this wonderful tradition for three years now and it is a wonderful way to 'pay it forward' for both patients and myself.

Interestingly, the second patient I shared this with took the money with a smile on her face, said 'What a great idea! I will match it with five dollars of my own and give it to someone in need.' I thanked her and thought to myself: 'What a wonderful demonstration of how gratitude is one of those few special things in life that increases as we give it away!' God bless you all. Have a happy, healthy and fulfilling holiday season.